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THE UNATTAINABLE IN THE LEYENDAS OF
GUSTAVO ADOLFO BECQUER

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The unattainable in the Leyendas of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer" submitted by Roger Stephen Burrows in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

The prose works of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer far outweigh, quantitatively, the poetry, and yet it is the latter which has received more critical attention. The intimate nature of the poems and their method of composition have given the poet a reputation for ethereality, a reputation which persists despite certain significant amendments to the traditional biographic view of the poet. The present study examines Bécquer's prose, and in particular the Leyendas, and finds that they are based on the same aesthetic and emotional concepts as the Rimas. Moreover, an examination of their structure leads to the conclusion that the writer is not using these concepts as a means of escape from reality. His "ethereality" is rather a conscious attempt to describe the workings of his imagination in order, in turn, to awaken in the reader's imagination a field of experience which Bécquer considers valuable and equally as real.

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INTRODUCTION

It is our experience that the name of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer is popularly linked with returning swallows and dramatic poses, an obvious legacy of school anthologies, and giving about as accurate a picture of the poet as the analogous one of Wordsworth doing nothing more than wandering lonely as a cloud and leaning over Westminster Bridge. Happily, scholarship no longer advocates this view so widely: the traditional biography of Bécquer has been examined in a more rigorous light, and thorough analyses of the craftsmanship and the structure of his poetry have given rise to the opinion that Bécquer is less a frustrated Romantic than a precursor of much of the Spanish poetry that has followed his.

The revision of opinion on Bécquer is still, however, sadly unbalanced, first of all in favour of the Rimas. As Sr. Casaldueiro noted: "La prosa de Bécquer, en cambio, no ha sido mirada con tanto interés".¹ Professor Benítez's Ensayo de bibliografía razonada de G. A. Bécquer² lists 123 items dealing exclusively with the Rimas while only 15 deal with the Leyendas. Of these, only three are general works on all the Leyendas. Eleven others concentrate either on one legend or on one aspect of several, and one examines their literary environment. The three general works are: A. Berenguer Carisomo's La prosa de Bécquer,³ which starts by assuming that Bécquer's prose is superior to his poetry; E. L. King's G. A. Bécquer: From Painter to Poet,⁴ which holds precisely the opposite view, and Dr. Angela Hämel's article, "Don Gustavo Adolfo Bécquers Legenden",⁵ in some respects eminently sensible, but still coloured by the view of Bécquer prevalent at the time it was written.

Secondly, Bécquer's attraction for what he cannot obtain has not been clearly understood. It has been given many names: "the elusive", "the incorporeal", "lo evanescente", "the unattainable". In the period of criticism when Bécquer was considered ethereal and Romantic, "the unattainable" could be explained as merely another manifestation of that ethereality. It is unfortunate that more recently, this concept has not been re-evaluated in the same way as his biography, since the result is the embarrassing dichotomy between the personalities of the man and the poet which confronts Professor King. This will be more fully described in the ensuing pages. In fact, "the unattainable" has not been satisfactorily explained by anyone except Dr. A. Inglis, who offers an incidental explanation when examining a quite different aspect of the Leyendas.⁶

In our opinion, the overall unbalanced view of Bécquer's work can be rectified, and the loose ends the critics had left thereby tied by examining the concept of the unattainable presented in his prose. In our first chapter, therefore, we undertake this examination and demonstrate that the unattainable ideas he sought to fulfil should not be accepted in isolation from, but rather as a result of, the aesthetic and philosophic ideas he puts forward throughout his work. To illustrate those ideas, we have chosen examples from many different sources in his production, but particularly from the Cartas literarias a una mujer where they are most clearly stated.

In our second and third chapters, we examine Bécquer's use of the unattainable in parts of his prose. Our initial intention is to deal with the Leyendas, but it must be acknowledged that to deal with them exclusively would result in the omission of such fundamental evidence as that which can

be found, for example, in El aderezo de esmeraldas and Tres Fechas. It would also negate by implication the view that Bécquer's principal ideas pervaded his entire output. The stories just mentioned are better classified, as in the edition of Bécquer's works used in this study,⁷ as Narraciones. Like the Leyendas, they are very imaginative, but they contain less fantasy. With the exception of the brief Apólogo (better classed as a Leyenda), they deal, not in situations remote in time or distance, ruined churches, apparitions and all the supernatural paraphernalia characteristic of the Leyendas, but with contemporary situations and places which Bécquer's readers would immediately recognize.

It is also true that some of the Leyendas do not include Bécquer's concept of the unattainable, although they may occasionally prove useful in illustrating other points in our discussion.⁸ The criterion used for the selection of stories, whether Leyendas or Narraciones, in Chapters 2 and 3, was the appearance of a definite element of the unattainable.⁹ The stories dealt with in those chapters are consistently referred to as Leyendas merely for convenience of reference, as it is upon the Leyendas proper that the greater part of our attention is concentrated.

When examining Bécquer's concept of the unattainable in Chapters Two and Three, we concentrate on the most frequently discussed and most frequently misconstrued of its aspects, the phenomenon of the Ideal Woman. It is shown that this ideal will not be understood by seeking its meaning through Bécquer's biography, nor by isolating it from the other manifestations of the unattainable in his work. This search for the Ideal Woman is simply one example of Bécquer's yearning for whatever lies beyond his reach, a desire which is shown to be the central element in the plots of many of the stories. The belief that this depiction of the unattainable is framed

within the specific context of his ideas about "poesía" outlined in the first chapter, inevitably leads us to reassess the traditionally held views about the content of the Leyendas, and to reconsider, for example, the role attributed to Fate.

Finally, in our fourth chapter, we have used those same ideas about "poesía", and what we were able to conclude about their application in the Leyendas, to suggest explanations for both the apparent vagueness of Bécquer's expression and his examination of the process of imagination. In fact, scholars have already found, when analysing the construction of the Rimas, that Bécquer was much less "vague" than had been thought. The imprecision of his language is, in the first place, a further manifestation of all that is beyond his grasp: the language needed to express the unattainable is itself unattainable. Secondly, the same imprecision is shown to be a vital part of a precise description of his imagination at work. In this connection, and in the light of a recent article by J. Hartsook,¹⁰ we have shown that the kind of impressionism analysed by both C. Blanco Aguinaga¹¹ and J. M. Aguirre¹² when dealing with the Rimas, must also be attributed to the Leyendas.

It is our conclusion, then, that the Leyendas, both in the nature of their content and in their expression represent Bécquer's justification and description of his entry into the world of fantasy, and an attempt thereby to communicate with the imagination of his readers.

NOTES

- ¹ J. Casaldueiro, Estudios de literatura española (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1962), p. 119.
- ² Ensayo de bibliografía razonada de G. A. Bécquer (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1961).
- ³ La prosa de Bécquer (Buenos Aires: Ruiz Hermanos, 1967).
- ⁴ G. A. Bécquer: From Painter to Poet (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1953).
- ⁵ Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift, X (1922), 349-357.
- ⁶ "The real and the imagined in Bécquer's Leyendas", BHS, XLIII (1966), 25-31.
- ⁷ Obras completas, 12th. ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966). References to the text will be indicated by a page number in parenthesis following the reference.
- ⁸ In this category are La cruz del diablo, La voz del silencio, La creación, La venta de los gatos, La fe salva, Memorias de un pavo and Apólogo.
- ⁹ See, for example, the schemes of the stories in Chapter Two. Included were all the Leyendas and Narraciones with the exception of seven (those enumerated in n. 8 above), in which the unattainable does not appear. In addition, it should be noted that the concept of the unattainable appears in other places in Bécquer's writings -- in some of his newspaper articles and in many passages of the Cartas literarias, for example. These and other instances are referred to as the occasion demands.
- ¹⁰ "Bécquer and The Creative Imagination", HR, XXXV (1967), 252-269.
- ¹¹ "La lucha con la palabra en Bécquer: definición e indefinición en las Rimas", Cuadernos Americanos, XIV (1965), 244-269.
- ¹² "Bécquer y 'lo evanescente'", BHS, XLI (1964), 28-39.

CHAPTER ONE

When Bécquer is asked the question "¿Qué es poesía?"; and answers "Poesía eres tú", it is clear that a close examination is needed of his precise meaning. Evidently, he has in mind something more than the general acceptance of "poetry": that of "composition in verse or metrical language", as the Shorter Oxford Dictionary puts it. This is not to say that the word never appears in Bécquer's work without this limited significance: indeed, the context often shows that he is referring to poetry as a form of literature. For an illustration, one could mention the much-quoted passage from his review of Augusto Ferrán's work La soledad: "Hay una poesía magnífica y sonora; una poesía hija de la meditación y el arte ..." (p. 1247). However, infinitely more important is the meaning of "poesía" implied in "poesía eres tú", for upon it hinge many of Bécquer's ideas.

Many of his statements on the subject of "poesía" are collected in the Cartas literarias a una mujer, written in 1860 and 1861, thereby providing proof that his ideas were established early in his career.¹ Other information, however, can be found throughout his work. For his writings are personal, not only in the sense that he may consciously have used them to illustrate his views and feelings, but also because one never has to look far for passages describing those ideas and feelings specifically. In his poetry, or in writings like the Cartas literarias or the Cartas desde mi celda, this is not surprising because they were conceived to give information about ideas and feelings. The same tendency, however, can be observed in his fictional works -- the Leyendas -- and also in his

many newspaper articles. In the majority of the Leyendas, for example, there is either an introduction or a conclusion in which the author appears. Even leaving aside Creed en Dios and La ajorca de oro, where he merely states that he is going to tell a story, there are still a relatively large number in which Bécquer makes some kind of positive comment about what follows or has preceded.²

Many of his newspaper articles, of course, are intended to give a personal commentary on some event or scene, and are therefore obviously personal in tone, such as in the description of his travels in Caso de ablativo or Roncesvalles. But in La Nena, a review of a Spanish ballet, Bécquer permits himself to digress on two occasions from the task in hand to give lyrical descriptions of Andalusia, and in Revista de salones, nothing more than a glorified society column, he starts with an extensive passage on the powers of the imagination and memory before proceeding to a task to which he is much less accustomed, that of describing the dresses of the ladies present without giving offence to any of them. The following passage, in a description of the room where the young people are dancing, well illustrates the point:

Si un traje os roza al pasar, es siempre un traje ligero, vaporoso, cuyo contacto produce en nosotros el mismo efecto que el roce de un ala de una mariposa; si escucháis rumor de voces, son voces suaves, argentinas, murmullo de aguas que corren, gorjeos de aves que cantan;... Y ciertamente que aunque no tengáis parte activa en aquellos poemas de amor, no dejaréis de participar de sus emociones, porque hay en las miradas que se cruzan en aquel ambiente tan fluido magnético, que parece que ejerce su influjo sobre todos los que encuentra a su paso. ¿Cuál es, si no, la explicación de las diversas impresiones que sentís en vuestro rostro mientras permanecéis en aquel recinto? (p. 1163)

This could be confused with many passages in the Cartas literarias for the ideas expressed are the same, and the power of imagination, sentiment and love is presented the same way. It is not surprising then, to find that the question "¿Qué es poesía?" and its answer occur twice in Bécquer's work: in Rima XXI, and in the first of the Cartas literarias. In the poem no comment is made; in the letter, Bécquer goes on to elaborate:

La poesía eres tú, te he dicho, porque la poesía es el sentimiento, y el sentimiento es la mujer.

La poesía eres tú, porque esa vaga aspiración a lo bello que la caracteriza, y que es una facultad de inteligencia en el hombre, en ti pudiera decirse que es un instinto.

.....

Ultimamente, la poesía eres tú, porque tú eres el foco de donde parten sus rayos. (p. 656)

Leaving aside what Jorge Guillén calls "la feminidad de la poesía",³ referring to Bécquer's likening it to woman, there remains the equation "poesía = sentimiento". As often in the Cartas literarias, Bécquer reduces his ideas to such formulae to make them understandable to his readers. In fact, to equate "poetry" with "feeling" goes a long way towards explaining his own particular use of the term, but it means that "feeling" must in turn be examined. First of all, however, this equation can be used to amend a small, but important point in Sr. Guillén's argument. In his article "La poética de Bécquer", he writes: "En su primera significación, el vocablo 'poesía' no alude a la obra hecha por el hombre, sino a lo que en el mundo real es poético" (see note 3). This statement admirably illustrates that a difference exists between poetry as a form of literature and "poetry" in Bécquer's sense, but it does not explain that

difference. To some extent it begs the question by saying that poetry is "that which is poetic". An examination of the Cartas literarias and Rima V shows that this is not in fact the case.

The "Yo" in Rima V is "poesía", so much is clear from the final stanza: "Yo, en fin, soy ese espíritu,/ desconocida esencia,/ perfume misterioso/ de que es vaso el poeta " (p. 443). However, the important point is that Bécquer makes no attempt to identify this "yo" with the "poetic" objects or places it enumerates: rather he points out that it is to be found associated with them. Hence, in stanza seven, the "yo" is not the song of the lark, nor the buzzing of the bee, nor the sounds of the depths of the night, but something intangible which sings with the lark, buzzes with the bee and imitates the sounds of the night. It is true that in the previous four stanzas, the "yo" is the object it enumerates, but it should be noted that these objects are already by nature intangible, or give the impression of intangibility:

Yo soy nieve en las cumbres,
soy fuego en las arenas,
azul onda en los mares
y espuma en las riberas.

En el laúd soy nota,
perfume en la violeta,
fugaz llama en las tumbas,
y en las ruínas hiedra. (p. 441)

Now, the poem has described "lo que en el mundo real es poético", (moonlight, birdsong, sunset, etc.), but this is not yet "poesía". The key comes in the antepenultimate and penultimate stanzas:

Yo soy sobre el abismo
el puente que atraviesa;
yo soy la ignota escala
que el cielo une a la tierra.

Yo soy el invisible
 anillo que sujeta
 el mundo de la forma
 al mundo de la idea. (p. 443)

"Poesía" in Bécquer's sense then, is a link between an object or situation and the ideas stimulated thereby in his mind. This link takes the form of an impression or feeling. Thus, in the Cartas literarias, "poesía" is "una aspiración a lo bello" rather than "lo bello" itself, and "poesía eres tú" only because "tú eres el foco de donde parten sus rayos". To use Sr. J. M. de Cossío's apt image, "la onda existe sin la antena".⁴ It is important to realize, however, that it is the radio wave which is "poesía" rather than the transmitter which broadcasts that wave.⁵

Viewed in this light, the equation "poesía = sentimiento" is not so nebulous. "Poetry" is indeed that which produces "feeling". In this feeling can be found the origin of the series of mental processes which Sr. Guillén isolates and explains in his article, and which lead to the eventual production of a work of literature. But "feeling", as Bécquer is quick to point out, is itself an effect, not a cause. The next question to be considered, therefore, is what is the cause of feeling, and consequently of "poetry"? The answer is to be found in the Cartas literarias:

¿Cuál podrá ser...[el origen] de este divino arranque de entusiasmo, de esta vaga y melancólica aspiración del alma, que se traduce al lenguaje de los hombres por medio de sus más suaves armonías sino el amor? (p. 661)

Bécquer's concept of love, as expressed in the Cartas literarias is not clear. At times it appears to be "eros" and at times "agape". Certainly it must be a blend of both. The importance of woman for

Bécquer is evident throughout his work and not least in the Cartas literarias:

...yo creo...que las mujeres son la poesía del mundo. (p. 666)

En la mujer, sin embargo, la poesía está como encarnada en su ser;...es, en una palabra, el verbo poético hecho carne. (p. 656)

On the other hand, love in the Christian sense cannot be ignored, nor is it excluded by sentiments like those expressed above.

...digo el amor porque la religión, nuestra religión sobre todo, es un amor también, es el amor más puro, más hermoso, el único infinito que se conoce... (p. 661)

A Dios, foco eterno y ardiente de hermosura, al que se vuelve con los ojos como a un polo de amor, el sentimiento de la tierra. (p. 671)

These two aspects of love have separate manifestations and yet are linked together very closely. An example of this is in Rima XVII, where love for God is presented as depending on love for woman:

Hoy la tierra y los cielos me sonríen;
hoy llega al fondo de mi alma el sol;
hoy la he visto...,la he visto y me ha mirado...
¡Hoy creo en Dios! (p. 451)

The two are also combined in the Cartas literarias:

...digo el amor porque la religión...es un amor también...y sólo a estos dos astros de la inteligencia puede volverse el hombre cuando desea luz que alumbre en su camino, inspiración que fecundice su vena estéril y fatigada. (pp. 661-662)

But having said that, Bécquer can give no more specific answer to the question "¿Qué es el amor?":

¿Quieres saber lo que es el amor? Recógete dentro de ti misma, y si es verdad que lo abrigas en tu alma, siéntelo y lo comprenderás, pero no me lo preguntes. (p. 665)

Now, it is easy to accept the importance of love in human relationships, especially in a Christian environment, and in this respect, Bécquer is saying nothing new. 1800 years previously, St. Paul had said: "In a word there are three things that last forever: faith, hope and love, but the greatest of them all is love."⁶ When St. John said: "Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God,...For God is love,"⁷ he was stating much the same as Bécquer's assertion that love "es la suprema ley del universo y...efecto de una primera causa: Dios" (p. 665). Yet although at first sight, his extension of the power of love to become a "ley misteriosa por la que todo se gobierna y rige, desde el átomo inanimado..." (p. 665), appears a little strange, it is a logical continuation of the ideas which have been isolated so far. It may be hard to imagine objects, natural phenomena for example, being governed by love, and yet in Rima IX, this is precisely the idea contained in the use of the verb "besar" applied to the dawn, the sun, the willow and so on. It is perfectly clear that these objects are not kissing each other: what is important is that for Bécquer they appear to be. If a willow tree touching a river makes him think of a kiss, the mental processes involved correspond with the genesis of "poesía". If this is extended to all the objects in the poem, Bécquer's statement that even inanimate objects are governed by love becomes clearer. Even better would be the statement that because he is governed by love, those inanimate objects appear to be. Expressed in these terms, his idea can be seen to be not far removed from the "Pathetic Fallacy" which is found in various periods of writing, and

which conceives of nature being in harmony with the moods of man.

Moreover, if a woman with whom he is in love is the very incarnation of "poesía", and if the same feeling of "poesía" is produced by other objects and situations, it is not difficult for him to attribute that to love as well. This will be seen to be most important in our examination of the Leyendas in later chapters. Not all the manifestations of "poesía" in his work are as clearly linked as in Rima IX, nor is it necessary for the link to be explicit. What is necessary is for the basic relationship between love and "poesía" to be understood. If this is not the case, Bécquer's ideas and their expression tend to seem hopelessly vague.

For example, one of the main characteristics of "poesía" appears very ethereal when not seen strictly in the context of his poetics. This is the aspiration towards perfection which it engenders:

...esa vaga aspiración a lo bello que la [i.e. poesía] caracteriza. (p. 656)

Sí. Que poesía es, y no otra cosa, esa aspiración melancólica y vaga que agita tu espíritu con el deseo de una perfección imposible. (p. 665)

or, in Rima VIII:

Cuando miro el azul horizonte
perderse a lo lejos,
al través de una gasa de polvo
dorado e inquieto,

me parece posible arrancarme
del mísero suelo,
y flotar con la niebla dorada
en átomos leves,
cual ella deshecho...

...En el mar de la duda en que bogo,
 ni aun sé lo que creo;
 ¡sin embargo, estas ansias me dicen
 que yo llevo algo
 divino aquí dentro! (pp. 444-445)

In this poem, it is because of "poesía" - the capacity to receive and retain the "algo divino" within him - that the sky and the stars take on a new significance which enables him to forget the "miserable suelo" for a moment. This is not new. Fray Luis de León's ode "Cuando contemplo el cielo..." describes how a contemplation of the starry sky evokes in him a desire to escape from this world to another, better one which he is confident exists because of his faith. But whereas Fray Luis is longing for spiritual union with God, Bécquer is not. Moreover, to write of Bécquer's expressing "the anguish of not being able to unite with pure light"⁸ is meaningless. He does not want to unite with anything. He merely recognizes that because of the "algo divino", the world of "poesía", which to others is as distant as the stars, seems to be accessible to him. Fray Luis wrote in the terms of his Christian faith, which in Bécquer's terminology is "el único infinito que se conoce", and by which he was capable of expressing himself similarly. For example, in Maese Pérez el organista he writes:

El sacerdote que oficiaba sentía temblar sus
 manos, porque Aquel que llevaba en ellas,
 Aquel a quien salubaban hombres y arcángeles,
 era su Dios, era su Dios, y le parecía haber
 visto abrirse los cielos y transfigurarse la
 Hostia. (p. 169);

in Creed en Dios;

Dejó atrás aquellas regiones y atravesó otras
 inmensidades llenas de visiones terribles,
 que ni él pudo comprender ni yo acierto a

concebir, y llegó, al cabo, al último círculo de la espiral de los cielos, donde los serafines adoran al Señor, cubierto el rostro con las triples alas y prosternados a sus pies. (p. 207);

and in the ninth of the Cartas desde mi celda:

Me figuro, en fin, todos los esplandores del cielo y de la tierra reunidos en una sola armonía, y en mitad de aquel foco de luz y de sonidos, la celestial Señora, resplandeciendo como una llama más viva que las otras resplandece entre las llamas de una hoguera, como dentro de nuestro sol brillaría otro sol mas brillante. (pp. 643-644)

This does not mean that Bécquer is Christian for the same reason and in the same way as Fray Luis de León or San Juan de la Cruz. To say "La sua anima è illuminata dal sole interiore della Fede" is substantially correct, but to follow this with "da queste inviolabili verità trae un'energia serena e la forza dominatrice del suo pensiero"⁹ is not. The "forza dominatrice" is not religion, but a broader concept: love. The fact that love embraces religion is the reason that Bécquer is religious (no attempt is being made to dispute this), not that religion comes first and implies love. If this were the case, Rima XVII, where he writes "Hoy creo en Dios" because a woman looks at him, would, taken at its face value, give a very poor picture of his faith. It is not meant to be an affirmation of belief from a man who was not religious before, but an illustration of the kind of impression the woman looking at him produced in his imagination: the "poesía" of the situation. Bécquer is certainly capable of writing in terms of "el único infinito que se conoce", but he is also able to write in terms of another, unknown infinity, that of the concept of love which governs all things.

Put him in a church, or before a lonely country cross, and his imagination works in such a way that the resultant descriptions have a religious flavour. But if that religious setting is removed, the vision is somewhat different. In La cruz del diablo, he writes:

Un mundo de ideas se agolpó a mi imaginación en aquel instante. Ideas ligerísimas sin forma determinada, que unían entre sí como un invisible hilo de luz, la profunda soledad de aquellos lugares, el alto silencio de la naciente noche, y la vaga melancolía de mi espíritu. (p. 110)

In the third of the Cartas desde mi celda, another landscape prompts him to write:

Después que hube abarcado con una mirada el conjunto de aquel cuadro, imposible de reproducir con frases siempre descoloridas y pobres, me senté en un pedrusco, lleno de esa emoción sin ideas que experimentamos siempre que una cosa cualquiera nos impresiona profundamente y parece que nos sobrecoge por su novedad o su hermosura. (p. 562);

while the Roman ruins in Toledo, in the section of the Historia de los templos de España which deals with the basilica of Santa Leocadia provoke the following:

Inútil fuera el querer hoy dar forma a los mil y mil pensamientos que asaltaron nuestra mente ...eran tan rápidas las ideas, que se atropellaban entre sí en la imaginación, como las leves olas de un mar que pica el viento; tan confusas, que deshaciéndose las unas en las otras, sin dar espacios a completarse, huían como esos vagos recuerdos de un sueño que no se puede coordinar... (p. 886)

Lest there should be any doubt as to the origins of visions such as the above, Bécquer says in the Cartas literarias: "[El amor] es, a su vez, origen de esos mil pensamientos desconocidos, que todos ellos son poesía verdadera y espontánea..." (p. 665). The reason for the insistence on confusion and mystery springs from the fact that "el amor es un misterio. Todo en él son fenómenos a cuál más inexplicable; todo en él es ilógico, todo en él es vaguedad y absurdo " (p. 657). It follows, then, that a certain element of the mysterious or unknown is inherent in every meaningful existence. This is clearly shown by an examination of some of the terms used by Bécquer when dealing with "poesía". It is a "vaga aspiración" for a "perfección imposible" (p. 665); it is a "gozo improviso...cuya causa ignoras" (p. 665). There will be "poesía" "mientras la ciencia a descubrir no alcance/ las fuentes de la vida,/ y en el mar o en el cielo haya un abismo/ que el cálculo resista" and "mientras la Humanidad, siempre avanzando,/ no sepa a do camina;/ mientras haya un misterio para el hombre" (pp. 439-440), and so on. Examples of this kind of terminology can be found throughout Bécquer's work.

The mystery is not always one of expression, but very frequently one of situation, and the reader soon learns to recognize those passages where "poesía" is to be found. It should be remembered that Bécquer is perfectly capable of giving an exact, even scientific description when he wishes: very good examples can be found in the architectural passages in the Historia de los templos de España. But the difference between the description of San Juan de los reyes and that of another building in Toledo - the old palace converted into a church in Tres fechas - is clear. The architectural details are presented in both, but are

subordinated in the second to the impression which the building as a whole causes:

Todas estas revoluciones, todas estas circunstancias especiales hubieran podido únicamente dar por resultado un edificio tan original, tan lleno de contraste, de poesía y de recuerdos como el que aquella tarde se ofreció a mi vista y hoy he ensayado, aunque en vano, describir con palabras. (p. 391)

The point is that his imagination is awakened by the fact that Bécquer does not know everything he would like to know about the building, even though the exterior is perfectly clear before his eyes:

Todo es original, todo armónico; aunque desordenado; todo deja entrever el lujo y las maravillas de su interior; todo deja adivinar el carácter y las costumbres de sus habitantes. (p. 389)

In his article Boceto del natural, Bécquer and three girls walk to a headland overlooking the sea, and his first reaction is to be attracted, as he often is, to the sight of the water:

Yo tendí la mirada por aquel mar sin límites y, sintiéndome lleno de su inmensa poesía, estuve a punto de prorrumpir en un himno. (p. 755)

But immediately he remembers the recently arrived Julia, cousin of the two other girls:

¡Un himno al mar!, necio de mí; yo haber creído un momento que podía hacerse, que había palabras bastantes; pero no. El verdadero himno, el verbo de la poesía hecho carne, era aquella mujer inmóvil y silenciosa... (p. 756)

He considers Julia to be "el verbo de la poesía hecho carne"¹⁰ precisely because a mystery has been built around her from the beginning of the article, culminating in:

Decidamente, aquella mujer se había atravesado
en mi camino para confundirme y desesperarme.
(p. 754)

...era necesario a toda costa que yo la co-
nociese, que supiese algo de ella; un día más
en la incertidumbre en que me encontraba
hubiera concluído por volverme loco. (p. 757)

The importance of this element of mystery is clearly illustrated in the beautiful article A la claridad de la luna. Bécquer is writing about the moon and prefers to do so without recourse to all the scientific information available. In his day, of course, man had not reached the moon, but there was still enough knowledge to make certain aspects of lunar astronomy anything but a mystery. So he ignores this knowledge in order that "poesía" shall still exist:

No; renuncio generosamente al telescopio cien-
tífico. Quiero contemplar la Luna como se pre-
senta a la vista, y creer que es lo que parece,
que, si en esto pierde la ciencia, en cambio gana
mucho la poesía, y váyase lo uno por lo otro. (p. 689)

He is in no way denying the scientific facts of the nature of the moon. He is merely pointing out that there is a difference between what the moon is and what it appears to be. This is indisputable. Surely it is not just for Bécquer that the moon, as well as "un planeta destrozado por la acción del fuego..." is "ese astro puro, sereno, misterioso, cantado por los poetas y tan querido de los corazones amantes" (p. 687)? Having established the difference, he goes on to say that what the moon appears

to be, represented by "poesía", has as much validity as what the moon is, or "ciencia". He is pointing out, in the midst of what Mrs. Rica Brown calls the "shoddy materialism of that post-Romantic epoch"¹¹ that there is more to life than that which can be scientifically proved.

In the article Roncesvalles, one can sense his disappointment at the encroachment of scientific investigation on the realm of the imagination. Realizing that nothing in the landscape before him is different from what the pilgrim in centuries gone by came to see, he wonders why his imagination is not working as it should. His conclusion is that if nothing in the scenery has changed, then the change must lie in the attitude of the person viewing it. More interesting is the reason he suggests for this change:

La crítica histórica, esa incrédula hija del espíritu de nuestra época...nos ha truncado la historia, nos niega a Bernardo del Carpio, nos disputa al Cid, hasta ha puesto en cuestión a Jesús...Pero ¿ha conseguido del todo su objeto? No lo sé. Por lo pronto, ha conseguido que aquí donde nuestros mayores se sentían embargados de una profunda emoción, donde se exaltaba su fantasía, donde se elevaba su espíritu, y vibraban, sacudidas por el entusiasmo, todas las fibras del sentimiento, nosotros nos sentemos indiferentes, encendamos un cigarro y, entornando los soñolientos ojos, nos entretengamos en arrojar bocanadas de humo al aire. (pp. 1023-1024)

As is well known, however, Bécquer is attracted by the past, and especially by Spain's past. Several of the Leyendas, many passages in the Cartas desde mi celda and, principally, the Historia de los templos de España bear witness to this fact. There would appear to be a contrast between Bécquer the historian in the Historia de los templos and Bécquer the

tourist in Roncesvalles deploring the activities of the historian. This contradiction is resolved when it is realized why he is attracted by the past. It is not by the discoveries made by the scientific approach of the historian or the arqueologist (see the comic sketch Un tesoro), but by the capacity of the past to evoke "poesía":

...las poéticas tradiciones, las derruidas fortalezas, los antiguos usos de nuestra vieja España, tienen para mí todo ese indefinible encanto, esa vaguedad misteriosa de la puesta del sol en un día espléndido, cuyas horas, llenas de emociones, vuelven a pasar por la memoria vestidas de colores y de luz, antes de sepultarse en las tinieblas en que se han de perder para siempre. (pp. 572-573)

It may in turn be asked why "poesía" is evoked by the past. The fourth of the Cartas desde mi celda explains:

Yo tengo fe en el porvenir...No obstante, sea cuestión de poesía, sea que es inherente a la naturaleza frágil del hombre simpatizar con lo que ya no existe, ello es que en el fondo de mi alma consagro, como una especie de culto, una veneración profunda por todo lo que pertenece al pasado...(p. 572)

Later in the same letter, he writes:

Estas innovaciones tienen su razón de ser, y, por tanto, no seré yo quien las anatematice. Aunque me entristece el espectáculo de esa progresiva destrucción de cuanto trae a la memoria épocas que, si en efecto no lo fueron, sólo por no existir ya nos parecen mejores...(p. 576)

The past evokes "poesía" then, simply because it is no longer present. This is a view which finds its logical extension in El calor. Written in the quietly humorous style of much of Bécquer's prose, it

describes the frustration he feels of returning from a stiflingly hot holiday resort to the attractions of a supposedly cool Madrid, only to find that on his arrival, the temperature soars.

Here again, one can consider conditions existing at the present time to equal "fact", and that which is no longer present to equal "the domain of the imagination". It can then be seen how dependent "poesía" is on the absence of the ideal, or rather, on the fact that if it were not always absent, it would not be that ideal. On his return to Madrid, the heat, which he had determined to escape, awakens his imagination to thoughts of cooler places:

Cuando el sol cae a plomo sobre la coronada
villa...Yo sueño...con todo lo fresco que he
sentido o me he imaginado en mi vida. (p. 1131)

Once his imagination is at work in this way, all the attractions of Madrid, to which he had looked forward on the beach at Algorta, become completely unsatisfactory. Imagine his disillusionment when, on approaching a woman, the very source of "poesía", he sees "con dolor que también sudan las mujeres..." (p. 1133). Once in Madrid, he is attracted differently. It is now the "ola fresca, transparente y verde, que en la playa de Algorta me brindaste con tu música de murmullos halagadores y tu espuma dispersa al aire en menudo rocío", which he asks to pity him for returning to Madrid: "y perdóname, que hartó caro pago mi incalificable tontería!" (p. 1132) This, of course, is the same wave to which a few days before, when it was lapping at his feet, Bécquer had said:

Ya te conozco, vieja marrullera;...Después de haber escuchado atentamente tus murmullos, de haber creído oír algo fantástico y extraño, como canciones vagas, palabras sueltas, suspiros, lamentos, cosas lejanas de las náyades que viven en su fondo, voltear de campanas de cristal de las ciudades que existen en tus abismos...he venido a sacar en consecuencia que todo ello no es más...que lo que se llama en mi país un camelo...(pp. 1129-1130).

At this stage, then, it can be seen that "poesía" - a prerequisite of meaningful existence for Bécquer - can be defined (insofar as definition is possible) as that which causes his imagination to be awakened. Imagination is at the root of Bécquer's ideas. It is imagination which enables him to look at an object and appreciate more than is physically there. What he appreciates about it he does not know, but it has been seen how attempts at definitions of "poetry", "feeling" and "love" fail, unless this unknown is taken into account. When Bécquer uses the words, he has in mind an impression, an impression, moreover, which is never produced unless there is some element of mystery surrounding its origin. As Mrs. Brown has clearly shown, this was used by Bécquer's early biographers, who "did him...a disservice by creating a legend for him: a legend in which a melancholy young man, inspired by sorrow to the heights of poetry, struggled vainly against the hand of fate, which set against him not only his poverty, but disappointment in love, domestic unhappiness and a body eaten away by sickness and sorrow."¹² Mrs. Brown did not examine Bécquer's work in her article, such was not her purpose. Yet although she has to a large extent freed his biography from popular misconceptions, Professor King still clings to the idea of the legendary Bécquer, by supposing two sides to his nature:

But if the popular accounts of Bécquer's life give a false picture of Bécquer the man, they are true in spirit to Bécquer the artist.... I believe that whatever Bécquer's tastes may have been, whatever his everyday character may have been, his imaginative - not his journalistic - writings are the natural expression of a person who, trained early in life as a painter and determined to be a writer, insists that his mind is filled with fantastic ideas for which there are no words, yet persists in expressing himself in words in one way or another. ¹³

But it is unnecessary to assume such a dichotomy. After all, Mrs. Brown nowhere denies the strength of Bécquer's imagination: her main concern is the strength of that of his friends. Indeed, the picture of Bécquer that she reconstructs from previously neglected sources, finds him as "the fairy uncle, preparing gay surprises and using his artistic talents and delightful, almost childlike imagination to give simple and ephemeral pleasure within a humble circle of intimate friends."¹⁴ Obviously, as she goes on to say, it is not a complete picture, because the imagination is activated by stimuli other than the desire to give pleasure, as has been seen. But it is the same imagination, not a completely different one which takes over from the first as soon as the circle of intimate friends leaves the room.

It is also difficult to see the distinction Professor King draws between a journalistic and an imaginative piece of writing. Leaving aside the Historia de los templos de España, La mujer de piedra and his plays, Bécquer wrote all his prose for newspaper publication and so it is all journalistic. His articles range from opera reviews, sensitive to the point of hyper-criticism, to comments on the difficulty of journalism. Yet those which do not give scope in some way to the writer's - and the

reader's - imagination, are few indeed. The concepts expressed in the Cartas literarias a una mujer can be found throughout his work - in verse as well as in prose. The "ansia perpetua de algo mejor" (p. 450), the "wordless fantasies" which Professor King finds,¹⁵ are present in all his work, but - most important - they spring logically and naturally from the basic tenets of his ideas as expressed in the Cartas literarias. Our next chapter will show how these concepts apply in his prose fiction, after the Rimas his best known work, yet so much neglected by criticism.

NOTES

- 1 Bécquer was born in 1836 and died in 1870. Most of his published work appears after the Cartas literarias. Exceptions are as follows:
 Poems: Rima XIII1859.
 Anacreóntica1855.
 A Quintana1855.

 Legends: Elcaudillo de las manos rojas1858.
 La cruz del diablo1860. (Oct.-Nov.)
 (The first Cartas literarias appeared in December.)

 Articles: Crítica literaria1859.
 El Maestro Hérolde1859.
 (Both these articles are further indications of
 the early formulation of Bécquer's views on
 "poesía" and artistic creation.)

- 2 The length and position of the comments Bécquer makes in the various Leyendas can be seen from the following scheme:

	Introduction	Conclusion
<u>La cruz del diablo</u>	3 pages.	
<u>El monte de las ánimas</u>	1/2 page.	
<u>Los ojos verdes</u>	1/2 page.	
<u>La cueva de la mora</u>	almost 3 pages.	
<u>La rosa de pasión</u>	1/3 page.	
<u>El rayo de luna</u>	1/4 page.	3 lines.
<u>El Miserere</u>	1 page.	1/3 page.
<u>El gnomo</u>		7 lines.

- 3 "La poética de Bécquer", Revista Hispánica Moderna, nos. 1-2 (1942), 1-42. Reprinted in Language and Poetry, trans. Ruth Whittredge (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 125-156.

- 4 Quoted by Guillén, art. cit., p. 2.

- 5 This amendment in no way alters the validity of Sr. Guillén's general argument, of course. In fact, it emphasizes the point he is making: "poesía" can and does exist independently of poets. For the purposes of this discussion, however, it is important to bear in mind the intangibility of "poesía" from the outset.

- 6 1 Corinthians 13, v. 13. (New English Translation.)

- 7 1 John 4, v. 8. (New English Translation.)

- ⁸ King, p. 124. This reference to Fray Luis de León is not an arbitrary one. The influence of neo-platonic ideas has been examined by Professor Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953). An article by Segundo Serrano Poncela ("Poética de Bécquer", Anales de la Universidad de Santo Domingo, 1946, 138-161) reveals the neo-platonic ideas in Bécquer's poetry.
- ⁹ Federico Olivero, "Il concetto religioso in Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer", Vita e Pensiero, XXXVII (Milano, 1954), 153-159.
- ¹⁰ Perhaps worthy of note is the connection here between woman and religion. There is a distinct echo of St. John's gospel, 1, v. 14.
- ¹¹ "The Bécquer Legend", BSS, XVIII (1941). See p. 7.
- ¹² Brown, p. 4.
- ¹³ King, pp. 59-60.
- ¹⁴ Brown, p. 11.
- ¹⁵ King, p. 61.

CHAPTER TWO

In their examinations of the Leyendas, critics have of course given great emphasis to the elements of imagination, fantasy and mystery to be found in their pages in a more or less extravagant form. As was mentioned before, however, the bibliography of works relating to the Leyendas is so very short that it is chiefly in the histories of literature that remarks of a general nature are to be read.

J. Cejador, while commenting on the verisimilitude of the legends, writes: "...hay un tan rico contenido de pensamiento poético y de elevados anhelos hacia lo infinito desconocido y misterioso..."¹ A. Valbuena Prat notes that some legends "se refieren a temas inefablemente líricos, borrosos, de misterioso confusionismo, que sugieren paralelos germánicos".² J. Casaldueiro goes into a little more detail on the subject:

...sus leyendas, que aunque sean narrativas o descriptivas, surgen siempre de un mismo sentimiento, el misterio, el cual impone el mismo desarrollo a todas ellas. A veces el misterio expresa la imposibilidad de captar el sentido ordenador de la vida o de la creación espiritual o del destino; otras, la purgación del pecado; por último el anhelo de belleza y amor.³

And comparing Bécquer's legends with those of Zorrilla, A del Río writes:

En la leyenda de Bécquer, en cambio, impera lo misterioso, lo sobrenatural y mágico; es arte lírico. Zorrilla es poeta de imaginación; Bécquer lo es de fantasía y sentimiento. Siente la poesía de los lugares que le inspiran...[y] va poblando esos lugares de fantasmas, mujeres ideales, o cabelleros enamorados, como su creador, de lo imposible y etéreo.⁴

It can be seen how all these writers mention the concept which Dr. Aguirre calls "lo evanescente",⁵ that which disappears as Bécquer tries to grasp it, the unattainable. But by merely mentioning it and not accounting for it, they all give an erroneous impression of Bécquer and his ideas. To illustrate this point, we shall first examine one of the more obvious forms the unattainable takes: the "anhelo de belleza y amor", expressed in the theme of the "Ideal Woman".

The "Ideal Woman" has been one of the most fertile sources of comment and speculation on Bécquer in the years since his death. Critics have vied with one another to identify, for example, the woman who inspired the Rimas. Julio Nombela has no doubt that she was Julia Espín y Colbrandt, with whom Bécquer was in love in 1858.⁶ J. P. Díaz⁷ warns his reader not to underestimate the importance of a certain Elisa Guillén, but bases his argument on the existence of three letters which Mrs. Brown calls "cartas apócrifas" and of whose authenticity she is by no means sure.⁸ On the other hand Heliodoro Carpintero insists on the role of Casta, Bécquer's wife.⁹ A. Irwin Shone, relying for his interpretation on the order of the Rimas as set out in the Libro de los gorrones manuscript, writes:

We are beginning to wonder how many mistresses Bécquer really had, if any. In his poems, they are innumerable; but his biographers assure us that he was busy earning a living, taking care of the children, struggling against consumption. They maintain that he could not possibly have had the affairs with the gorgeous women that his poems paint, that it was an economic and physical impossibility. Perhaps these women are but creatures of his brain...We doubt it. Some may have been imaginary, but we feel that he loved many women. His poems are too alive, too surcharged with physical emotions to be the products of a sublimated passion.¹⁰

Predictably, Professor King's view is that

"ella" is neither one woman, nor several women, nor an imaginary woman...; that the language of carnal love, the image of the kiss, is the best that Bécquer can find to express his desire for union with the absolute.¹¹

Now, it is a dangerous process at the best of times to attempt to interpret an author's work by means of his biography. In Bécquer's case, it is even more so, as one cannot help but be surprised and even overwhelmed by the contradictory evidence which is available even on the most seemingly straightforward detail. Was Casta beautiful: Gerardo Diego says: "Si no hermosa según un cánón de perfección, era extraordinariamente atractiva, graciosa y desenvuelta".¹² But according to Nombela, Cejador writes, she was "vulgar, y nada guapa".¹³ Were the first years of Bécquer's marriage happy? Opinions are again contradictory. Carpintero writes:

La vida matrimonial de Bécquer comenzaba bien. Parecía haber hallado la primera felicidad de su vida. "Vivía bastante bien con su mujer", afirma doña Julia,¹⁴

while Olmsted observed that "Bécquer...contracted...an unfortunate marriage which embittered the rest of his life",¹⁵ and Nombela "que ni era desgraciado ni dichoso".¹⁶

On the other hand it would be nonsense to deny that Bécquer's life had any influence in his writing or his ideas. As an example one can point to the definite change in his attitude towards woman which surrounds his marriage in May 1861. None of his works published before this date bear any trace of the disillusionment with women which was to colour some

of his later writing. Her importance is clearly established in the Cartas literarias a una mujer, while of the three Rimas published before his marriage, Nos. XIII and XXIII are delicate and intense love poems. No. LXI is infinitely sadder in tone it is true, but the sentence which accompanied its publication only serves to emphasize the importance of women implicit in it: "Es muy triste morir joven y no contar con una sola lágrima de mujer".¹⁷

But Bécquer's next legends, published - all in El contemporáneo - after a break of a few months following his wedding, are:

La creación 6th June, 1861.

La ajorca de oro 7th November, 1861.

El monte de las ánimas 7th November, 1861.

¡Es raro! 17th November, 1861.

Los ojos verdes 15th December, 1861.

With the exception of La creación, which could easily have been written before his marriage, all these stories contain an element hitherto unknown in his work: the "femme fatale", to whom the hero of the story gives his love, only to find that that very love brings his ruin or even death. In Los ojos verdes, Fernando meets his death because he allows himself to be enticed by the mysterious woman in the lake. In ¡Es raro!, Andrés, having acquired a dog, a horse and a wife, considers himself to be supremely happy. But when his wife disappears and Andrés finds that she was not abducted, but rather has escaped with a lover, he is overcome with grief and dies. What is more, in La ajorca de oro and El monte de las ánimas, Bécquer uses the woman in each story to generalize on woman as a whole. In the former, Pedro loves María "con ese amor en que se busca un

goce y sólo se encuentran martirios " (p. 131), but she is "caprichosa, caprichosa y extravagante como todas las mujeres del mundo" (p. 131).

When Beatriz, in the latter story, shows her indifference to some remark of Alonso's, "todo un carácter de mujer se reveló en aquella desdeñosa contracción de sus delgados labios" (p. 143).

The "femme fatale" motif occurs again in later legends such as El Cristo de la Calavera and La corza blanca, it is true. However, one cannot ignore the fact that out of five stories all written within seven months of Bécquer's marriage, four should announce in no uncertain terms to the readers of a respectable Madrid newspaper, the impossibility of finding true love and happiness, and should put the blame for this squarely on the shoulders of the woman. He does admit, of course, that he will be the last to benefit from Manrique's discovery in El rayo de luna that love is a moonbeam, "dadas mis condiciones de imaginación" (p. 180), but one wonders if he is beginning to feel that the "poesía" of which woman is the source may start to wear thin when one has to live with it for twenty-four hours a day!

Conversely, it should not be supposed that Bécquer was so preoccupied with "poesía" and "lo inalcanzable" that no woman could have made him happy:

De haber tenido en aquel momento la suerte de conocer a una mujer buena, sencilla, trabajadora y comprensiva, es posible que Gustavo hubiese conocido en el matrimonio una felicidad natural y sana.

Mrs. Brown follows this passage with some convincing conjectures of possible causes of domestic friction. Gustavo appears, however unwittingly, to have got on Casta's nerves. Professor Olmsted's report of Julia Espín's

cruel "perhaps he would move my heart more if he moved my stomach less",¹⁹ is borne out by Gonzalo de Reparaz's assertion that his mother was annoyed by Bécquer's habit of stretching out on her sofa with his muddy boots on, when her husband's circle of friends met at their house.²⁰ Moreover, Mrs. Brown, in the same section, makes it no less clear that Casta annoyed Gustavo.

But interesting as may be this question of how far Bécquer's life formed his work, it is necessary to agree with Sr. Casaldueiro's comment that "si es lícito fijarse en ese elemento humano de la obra becqueriana, haríamos mal deteniéndonos en él sin seguir adelante".²¹ It matters not who the "mujer inalcanzable" is. In his article "La mujer inalcanzable como tema en ciertas leyendas de Bécquer," Professor W. Woolsey writes that in the leyendas "presenciamos la tragedia del hombre siglo XIX que ve a su amada arrancada a sus brazos por la enfermedad y la muerte".²² This, however, is far too Romantic an interpretation. Even if it is possible to attribute the "inspiration" to a particular woman, it is incorrect to assume that she is Bécquer's muse in the same way as Teresa Mancha was Espronceda's. Indeed, as will be seen, Bécquer is perfectly capable of writing about a woman he has never seen. Professor Woolsey concludes: .

Explíquese de cualquier modo el tema de la mujer inalcanzable, no es posible negar su importancia en toda la obra de Bécquer. Da oportunidad al autor de indicar lo inexpresable, de evocar lo inefable, de sugerir los sufrimientos, las esperanzas, los sueños que existen en el fondo del alma del hombre lo mismo que en la fantasía del poeta. ¿Cómo se puede calcular la belleza que se encuentre en la prosa y en la poesía de Bécquer que no existiera sin el motivo del amor imposible, de la mujer que siempre se nos escapa?²³

Now, of course "el amor imposible" is an important theme in the leyendas. One would be hard put to disagree. The vital question is why it is an important theme. All the legends with which Professor Woolsey deals go to illustrate the frustration of finding that love is impossible and the anguish of having it torn away at the last minute. But there are two other stories with which he does not deal, in which "el amor imposible" also appears, and which, had he considered them, would have led him to answer that question. These are Tres fechas (20, 22, 24 July, 1862) and El Cristo de la Calavera (16, 17 July, 1862), both published in El contemporáneo. It will be useful to examine them in detail.

Tres fechas deals with three apparently isolated incidents in which Bécquer was involved on three separate visits to Toledo. On each occasion, he wrote the date of that incident on a page in his sketch-book, thereby explaining the title of the story.²⁴ On the first, he is walking through a picturesque street when he notices that the curtain in a particularly striking window drops as he turns to look at it, as if someone were watching him. Now, it is not unusual in an out-of-the-way street, as Bécquer says this was, for some residents to lift their curtains slightly at any sound of passers-by. But his imagination begins to work, and it is interesting to notice the stages by which he creates a whole story with no more raw material than the dropping of a curtain, the unusualness of both window and street, and his own imagination.

First of all, he establishes the identity of the person at the window, not deductively - the facts are after all minimal - but intuitively:

Seguí mi camino, preocupado con la idea de la ventana, o, mejor dicho, de la cortinilla, o, más claro todavía, de la mujer que la había levantado porque, indudablemente, a aquella ventana tan poética, tan blanca, tan verde, tan llena de flores, sólo una mujer podía asomarse, y cuando digo una mujer, entiéndase que se supone joven y bonita. (p. 384)

Then, having suggested this to himself, he confirms it by what he sees, not with the eyes, but with the imagination:

La verdad es que, realmente, detrás de ella no vi nada; pero, con la imaginación, me pareció descubrir un bulto: el bulto de una mujer, en efecto. (p. 384)

He is now perfectly convinced that there is a woman behind the curtain. Moreover, he is given no opportunity to forget the whole episode because the curtain moves each time he walks down that street. His imagination is by now in full flight:

...¡cuánto no soñaría yo con aquella ventana y aquella mujer! ¡Qué historias imposibles no forjaría yo en mi mente! Yo la conocía. Ya sabía cómo se llamaba y hasta qué era el color de sus ojos. (p. 384)

Not only has he a perfect picture of her appearance, he also knows of her actions and even of her thoughts:

La miraba cruzar por los extensos y solitarios patios de la antiquísima casa...coger flores y sentarse sola en un banco de piedra, y allí, suspirar, mientras las desahojaba, pensando en ...¡Quién sabe! Acaso en mí. ¿Que digo acaso? En mí seguramente. ¡Oh! ¡Cuántos sueños, cuántas locuras, cuánta poesía, despertó en mi alma aquella ventana mientras permanecí en Toledo!... (p. 385)

Several months later, he visits the city again, and wanders into an old deserted square. In this square stands the mysterious building, the palace which became a convent, which was mentioned in our first chapter.²⁵ "Poesía" is there in plenty, with the inevitable result that he is lost in day-dream. Suddenly, he is awakened:

Había visto, no me puede caber duda, la había visto perfectamente, una mano blanquísima que, saliendo por uno de los huecos de aquellos miradores de argamasa, semejantes a tableros de ajedrez, se había agitado varias veces, como saludándome con un signo mudo y cariñoso. Y me saludaba a mí, no era posible que me equivocase...Estaba solo, completamente solo en la plaza. (p. 392)

Again, nothing more than this happens, but there is no need for him to explain his thoughts when he writes the second date - "la fecha de la mano" - in his sketch-book next to the first:

Al escribirla miré un momento la anterior, la de la ventana, y no pude menos de sonreírme de mi locura. (pp. 392-393)

A year later, he is again in that square. This time he hears a church service in progress in the convent, and enters. A young novice is taking her nun's vows:

Al poner el pie en el umbral, la religiosa se volvió por la última vez hacia el altar. El resplandor de todas las luces la iluminó de pronto, y pude verle el rostro. Al mirarlo, tuve que ahogar un grito. Yo conocía a aquella mujer: no la había visto nunca, pero la conocía de haberla contemplado en sueños; era uno de esos seres que adivina el alma o los recuerda acaso de otro mundo mejor, del que, al descender a este, algunos no pierden del todo la memoria.

Dí dos pasos adelante; quise llamarla,
no sé; me acometió como un vértigo; pero en
aquel instante la puerta claustral se cerró
...para siempre. (p. 400)

Later, in conversation with an old woman in the small congregation, a woman who turns out to have been the nun's nurse, he finds out where she had lived:

Cuando oí el nombre de la calle, no pude con-
tener una exclamación de sorpresa. (p. 401)

At this point, the story ends with a reference to the "hilo de luz" alluded to in the introduction to the story, the "hilo de luz" which binds the three episodes together. He still does not know whether the girl he has just seen take her vows was the same as the one who waved from the tower or who looked at him from behind the curtain, but this is no cause for pity. The story is much richer in "poesía" because of the very fact that he does not know. He is still able to ask himself:

...Algún día, en esa hora misteriosa del crepúsculo
...habrá exhalado un suspiro alguna mujer al cruzar su
imaginación la memoria de estas fechas?
¡Quién sabe!
¡Oh! Y si ha suspirado, ¿dónde estará ese
suspiro? (p. 402)

He is still able to use the three episodes to make "mil y mil variaciones, en las que pudiéramos llamar absurdas sinfonías de la imaginación" (p. 381). Absurd they may be, but just as in A la claridad de la luna, what he does not know, he can therefore imagine, and this for him is much more valuable than what he does know.

El Cristo de la Calavera is even more specific. The important parts of the story are soon told. Two close friends, Alonso de Carnillo and

Lope de Sandoval, are both rivals for the favours of Doña Inés de Tordesillas, who, like many of Bécquer's female characters, is incomparably beautiful, but haughty in the extreme. Their rivalry becomes so intense that they decide to fight a duel, which, because of the impending departure of the king's army against the Moors, has to take place at night. They search the streets of Toledo for a lighted spot and eventually find a lantern illuminating an image of Christ. But each time they begin to fight, the light goes out, only to burn again as they draw apart. Lope eventually realizes the significance of this:

"¡Ah!" exclamó Lope al ver a su contrario entonces, y en otros días su mejor amigo, asombrado como él, como él pálido e inmóvil.

"Dios no quiere permitir este combate porque es una lucha fratricida, porque un combate entre nosotros ofende al Cielo ante el cual nos hemos jurado cien veces una amistad eterna."

Y esto diciendo, se arrojó en los brazos de Alonso, que lo estrechó entre los suyos con una fuerza y una efusión indescibles. (p. 234)

They then decide to visit Doña Inés and let her choose between them.

However, when they arrive at her house

...vieron, no sin grande asombro, abrirse el balcón del palacio de su dama, surgir en el un hombre que se deslizó hasta el suelo, al parecer con la ayuda de una cuerda, y, por último, una forma blanca, doña Inés, sin duda, que, inclinándose sobre el calado antepecho, cambió algunas tiernas frases de despedida con su misterioso galán. (p. 235)

The intention of the story is clear. Dona Inés is the highest pinnacle of aspiration in the Court: "la mujer ideal". But she turns out to be not so ideal after all, and for Lope or Alonso to have died

in their attempt to attain her would have been as useless as the success of the victor. Consequently the story ends happily, like Tres fechas, in the way just described. It might lead us to speculate on the outcome of Tres fechas itself. If that invisible force had not restrained Bécquer, would he have found the woman of his dreams? It is extremely doubtful, because after all, he had never seen the girl before except in his imagination. His story parallels closely up to this point with that of Manrique in El rayo de luna. In their imaginations both conjure up a woman, the ideal woman. But when both have her within their grasp, Manrique siezes her and Bécquer is just too late. The result is that Manrique finds a moonbeam and is driven mad, whereas Bécquer is left with an infinite wealth of memories and visions. It is not simply the actual act of grasping the unattainable which is disappointing for Manrique, or for Lope and Alonso, however, but the realization that the unattainable turns out to be much less alluring than they at first thought.

At this point, it is convenient to consider Sr. Casaldüero's statement, mentioned earlier, that as the legends have the same starting point - "el misterio" - they have the same development. The parallels of construction in Tres fechas and El rayo de luna have just been pointed out and in five of the seven legends mentioned in Professor Woolsey's article which deal with the "Ideal Woman" theme,²⁶ the same parallels can be observed. Certainly, the details of character and situation are vastly different, but in El beso, Los ojos verdes, La cueva de la mora, La corza blanca and El rayo de luna, there are certain elements in common.

- (1) The plot is so constructed as to make it clear that, in the context of the story, the woman should be unattainable. In El rayo de luna this is because she does not exist; in La corza blanca, because she is not mortal; in El beso because she is a statue; in Los ojos verdes because she lives in a lake to which superstition forbids access, and in La cueva de la mora because she is of a different religion.
- (2) The main characters in the story ignore this unattainability and are punished. Manrique goes mad. Garcés undergoes the mortification of finding that he has killed his beloved and the other three meet their death in various unpleasant ways. The contrast should be noticed between these stories on the one hand, and Tres fechas and El Cristo de la Calavera on the other. In the last two, the main characters accept the unattainability of their desires, however reluctantly, and remain unharmed.

It is perfectly possible to apply this same pattern to the other legends, which do not deal with the theme of the unattainable woman but rather with the unattainable as a more general concept. Moreover, in these stories, it is not so easy for one's judgement of Bécquer's treatment of the theme to be coloured by any real or imagined biographical references.

Again, the stories are constructed in vastly different ways. Some are religious in content: Creed en Dios, El Miserere and El caudillo de las manos rojas. Others are religious in setting: La ajorca de oro, Maese Pérez el organista, El monte de las ánimas. One takes place on the

slopes of the Moncayo in Aragon: El gnomo, and one in the streets of Madrid: El aderezo de esmeraldas. But the basic similarity is shown in the following schemes which select the relevant points of each story. Each scheme contains three parts, answering the following three questions:

- (1) What is the unattainable element in the story?
- (2) Is this element accepted as unattainable by the characters or not?
- (3) What is the result of this acceptance or rejection?

El Miserere:

(1) Not the "Miserere" itself, but the expression of it by the musician.

(2) No: the musician tries frantically to complete the divine "Miserere", of which he has heard only a few verses.

(3) He is driven mad by his inability to do so.

La ajorca de oro:

(1) The golden bracelet, unattainable because it is worn by the most revered statue of the Virgin in Toledo Cathedral.

(2) No: Pedro tries to steal it.

(3) He is driven mad when he sees the other statues come to life to prevent him escaping with it.

Maese Pérez el organista:

(1) Being able to play Maese Pérez's organ.

(2) No: the rival organist, depicted as a very unpleasant character, proceeds to do so against the wishes of the congregation.

(3) He is terrified by the appearance of Maese Pérez's ghost and is later the object of the Archbishop's wrath when the true quality of his music is revealed in the Cathedral.

El Monte de las ánimas.

- (1) Climbing the mountain on All Souls' night.
- (2) No: Alonso returns to look for Beatriz's sash.
- (3) Alonso is killed by wolves. However, Beatriz is punished as well. Both, of course, are equally as guilty of ignoring the unattainable, although their reasons for doing so are quite different.

El caudillo de las manos rojas:

- A (1) Ultimately, the removal of the bloodstains from Pulo's hands.
- (2) No: he breaks the vow which would enable him to remove them before he and Siannah reach the sacred spring in the Himalayas.
- (3) The bloodstains remain on his hands, and Siannah is taken from him.

B (1) Reunion with Siannah.

- (2) No: he breaks the vow which would enable him to find her again by spying on the mysterious sculptor's work.
- (3) He realizes that Siva, the god of destruction, has triumphed over his (Pulo's) protector, and commits suicide just as Siannah reappears.

Creed en Dios:

- (1) Teobaldo wishes to see God face to face on his journey through the heavens.
- (2) Yes: he is blinded before he is able to do so.
- (3) He returns to earth a changed man: from the epitome of the "wicked baron", he becomes "un miserable pecador, que, arrepentido de sus faltas, viene a confesarlas [al] abad y a pedirle que lo admita en el seno de su religión" (p. 210).

El aderezo de esmeraldas:

- (1) Recognition by the woman to whom he has given the emeralds.
- (2) Yes: he wakes up from his daydream just as she appears in his room where he lies wounded after his duel.
- (3) The possibility of being able to make from this Histoire de ce qui n'est pas arrivé (the title of the book that prompted Bécquer's friend to tell the story) "un millón de historias a cuál mejor" (p. 379).

La rosa de pasión:

- (1) Sara's love for the Christian, impossible because of religious differences.
- (2) Yes: Sara sacrifices herself to save her lover's life.
- (3) She receives an everlasting reward for her love in the form of a flower which grows on her grave.

La promesa:

- (1) Margarita's love for Pedro, impossible because of social differences.
- (2) Yes: Margarita dies.
- (3) Her love, symbolized in the story by the mysterious hand which protects Pedro in battle, receives a reward in the form of a flower which grows on her grave.

Lest, in these two legends, a flower should seem small consolation for what the two women gave up, La promesa and La Rosa de pasión will be considered later in our next chapter from a different angle. This will resolve any difficulty.

There remains one story to be considered: El gnomo. There is no difficulty in fitting it into the same scheme:

A. Marta

- (1) The promises made by the voice of the water.
- (2) No.
- (3) She is lured into the spring where she meets her death.

B. Magdalena

- (1) The promises made by the voice of the air.
- (2) Yes: it is impossible to grasp them.
- (3) It leads her away from the danger which lurks in the spring.

This, however, does not do the story justice, and thus it is worthy of further examination. For the evident contrast which Bécquer draws between the two sisters is also important. First, their appearance and character are contrasted. Marta is "altiva, vehemente en sus inclinaciones y de una rudeza salvaje en la expresión de sus afectos" (p. 247), while Magdalena is "humilde, amante, bondadosa" (p. 247). Marta is "enjuta de carnes, quebrada de color, de...cabellos crespos y oscuros que sombraban su frente" (p. 247), and Magdalena is "blanca, rosada, pequeña, infantil en su fisonomía...y con unas trenzas rubias...semejantes al nimbo dorado de la cabeza de un ángel" (p. 248). From these sketches, it is evident that Bécquer's sympathies lie with Magdalena. The contrast is continued when they are both attracted to the spring. The voices of the water and the air speak to the two girls. Both voices, of course, represent some aspect of the unattainable. The water is inhabited by gnomes whose riches are described early in the story as very desirable, but on no account to be pursued. The wind has precisely the sort of voice which would be very attractive to Bécquer with its promise of "amor y sentimiento" (p. 255). But when he makes it clear that each

girl only hears one voice - Marta that of the water and Magdalena that of the wind - he is drawing an evident contrast between the attraction of material wealth and more spiritual well-being, to the obvious advantage of the latter. Yet it also remains true that whereas Marta goes too far in her search for the unattainable, Magdalena returns home safely, led from the danger in the spring by the voice of the wind.

From the findings in this chapter, then, the following facts emerge. The tendency to concentrate on the real or supposed biographic aspects present in the "mujer inalcanzable" legends should be avoided. There is in fact no need to consider those stories in vacuo and to leave the others to explain themselves. Nor is it valid merely to consider legends in which the characters experience frustration at finding that that for which they strive is disappointing. All the legends should be considered together to see if any clear pattern emerges in their treatment of the unattainable. It can be seen that this is the case. Each has an element of the unattainable which attracts the main characters. If they ignore this unattainability, they are punished. If, on the other hand, they accept it, however reluctantly, they are, from Bécquer's point of view, rewarded.

It should be emphasized that the unattainable is not always presented as a frantic search after a nebulous moonbeam. In many cases (e.g. El caudillo de las manos rojas), the element is unattainable because it is forbidden. By this device, Bécquer emphasizes two points. First, the human aspect of the desirability of the unattainable. Even in the Garden of Eden, it will be remembered, the tree of forbidden

fruit was an extremely attractive one. Secondly, however, the point is clear that if something is forbidden by a superior authority, and if its warnings against it remain unheeded, that authority will punish any disregard as a matter of course, and will be right to do so.

NOTES

- ¹ J. Cejador y Frauca, Historia de la lengua y literatura castellana (Madrid, 1918), VIII, 206.
- ² Historia de la literatura española, 5th. ed. (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1957), III, 275.
- ³ Casaldueiro, p. 119.
- ⁴ Historia de la literatura española (New York: The Dryden Press, 1948), II, 105.
- ⁵ Aguirre, art. cit.
- ⁶ Impresiones y recuerdos (Madrid, 1907-1912), I, 427-429, quoted by Rica Brown, Bécquer (Barcelona: Aedos, 1963), pp. 112-113.
- ⁷ Díaz, pp. 92-96.
- ⁸ Brown, Bécquer, pp. 122-124.
- ⁹ Bécquer de par en par (Madrid: Insula, 1957), p. 168.
- ¹⁰ "Are the Rimas a key to Bécquer's life?", Hispania, XIII (1930), 469-484.
- ¹¹ King, pp. 140-141.
- ¹² Quoted by Brown, Bécquer, pp. 157-158.
- ¹³ Cejador, VIII, 210.
- ¹⁴ Carpintero, p. 38.
- ¹⁵ Everett Ward Olmsted, Legends, Tales and Poems of G. A. Bécquer (Boston, 1907), pp. xxiii-xxiv.
- ¹⁶ Quoted by Brown, Bécquer, p. 153.
- ¹⁷ Quoted by Brown, Bécquer, p. 110.
- ¹⁸ Brown, Bécquer, p. 158.

¹⁹Olmsted, p. xxii.

²⁰Quoted by Brown, Bécquer, p. 159.

²¹Casalduero, p. 105.

²²Hispania, XLVII (1964), 277-281. (See p. 277).

²³Woolsey, p. 281.

²⁴In fact, there is a slight inconsistency in the story, Bécquer states (p. 380) that he has three dates written in the sketch-book. Later (pp. 401-402), he writes: "Esta fecha, que no tiene nombre, no la escribí en ninguna parte. Digo mal, la llevo escrito en un sitio en que nadie más que yo la puede leer, y de dónde no se borrará nunca." This, of course, does not refer to the sketch-book.

²⁵See above Chapter One, pp. 17-18.

²⁶Professor Woolsey deals with seven. Two of them, however, La ajorca de oro and La rosa de pasión do not deal in the same way with an unattainable woman. In La ajorca de oro, María is not unattainable in the same way as, for example, the woman in Los ojos verdes. Pedro is directly striving not for her, but for the bracelet. La rosa de pasión deals with love from the woman's point of view, as does La promesa, and as such merits special consideration in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

"No sólo en las Rimas, sino también en varias leyendas, encuentra el lector manifestada la ilusión del amor para una mujer que lleva al amante a la locura, a la muerte, o a matar al ser querido",¹ writes Professor Woolsey. This, of course, is perfectly true, but the question of why the lover is driven to death, madness or murder has not until recently been answered. Indeed, critics have shown remarkable unanimity in just missing the point. It has been generally assumed that because the cup of happiness is dashed from the lips of Bécquer's heroes just as they are going to drink, then Fate is responsible. Professor Woolsey states that in the leyendas "se introduce el tema de la suerte - la fatalidad que persigue inexorablemente los pasos del hombre",² and later illustrates this with reference to La cueva de la mora:

La fatalidad que a Bécquer le gusta tanto introducir como elemento determinante en las leyendas suyas ha hecho imposible los amores de los dos jóvenes en la tierra. Una vez más solo hay frustración y separación para los amantes.³

Dr. Angela Hämel writes;

Ebenso pessimistisch zeigt uns Don Gustavo im "Rajah mit den roten Händen" die Unabwendbarkeit des menschlichen Schicksals, den vergeblichen Kampf des alles versuchenden Menschen gegen die Rache und den Zorn der Götter.⁴

Professor King accepts the role of Fate also, and attributes to it an excess in description which he considers to be one of the defects of the

Leyendas:

If what little development of change there is in [the] Leyendas is brought about not by the characters acting either deterministically or willfully, but rather by the intervention of supernatural forces, there is little story to tell. But if there is to be a story, there must be more to it than the simple narration of the supernatural facts. Bécquer fills in his stories - who can say he consciously pads them out? - with description.⁵

But in view of the pattern which it has been possible to find in the Leyendas, this role of Fate in Bécquer's work should now be questioned. It is surprising to note that Professor King's remark follows immediately a very brief synopsis of each of the legends in which he repeatedly illustrates that their development is, in fact, brought about by the characters acting "deterministically or willfully" and not by the "intervention of supernatural forces". As Dr. Hämel, Professor King and Dr. Inglis (whose ideas will be cited below) all mention El caudillo de las manos rojas in this context, it will perhaps be convenient, in turn, to consider it. The plot has been broken down to its barest essentials in the previous chapter to show how it conforms to the pattern of the Leyendas generally, but a fuller examination will resolve the question of the role of Fate.

Dr. Hämel mentioned the parts the Gods play in the story, and it is a fact that the limits within which the human characters can move are imposed by Vishnu and Siva. Vishnu is the god who protects Pulo from the wrath of Siva. He instructs him how to remove the stains of fratricide from his hands and warns him that he is in danger from Siva every time he does not obey. Pulo is told:

Asesino marcado por Siva con un sello de eterna infamia, sólo existe una penitencia con que puedes expiar tu crimen: sube por las orillas del Ganges, a través de los pueblos feroces que habitan sus riberas, hasta encontrar sus fuentes. El remoto país del Tibet, a quien defiende como un gigante muro la cordillera del Himalaya, es el término de tu viaje. Cuando llegues a él, lava tus manos en el más escondido de los manantiales y a la hora en que el valiente Tippot cayó a tus plantas. Si en el discurso de tu peregrinación no conoces a tu esposa Siannah, que deberá acompañarte, la sangre desaparecerá de tus manos. (p. 67)

These instructions mark the limit of the possible and the permitted as far as Pulo is concerned. But almost at the end of the journey, they are for one brief moment ignored. Siannah and Pulo are resting in the heat of the day. Siannah, quite the opposite of the "femme fatale", is worried lest she should be the agent whereby her husband breaks his promise to Vishnu:

...aparte tus ojos de los míos, vuélvelos al cielo o duerme; mas no me los claves en el alma. (p. 73)

Therefore, when he asks her to sing a love song, she does so only reluctantly. Moreover, her fears are not unfounded:

El canto de Siannah expira, y con él, suave y armonioso, el rumor de un beso. (p. 76)

Even though Bécquer may then write "¿Qué son los vanos castillos que eleva la voluntad del hombre para combatir las funestas armas de que se vale la fatalidad?" (p. 76), it is clear that this is first and foremost a conscious act on the part of Pulo, a fact which even Siva

recognizes... "El príncipe faltó a su promesa" (p. 78). Just as Siva is about to destroy Pulo, however, Vishnu extends his protection once more but imposes a set of even stricter conditions for the expiation of Pulo's guilt, going to the extent of taking away the most immediate source of temptation: Siannah. Pulo does as Vishnu bids him and is once more almost at the point of reaching supreme happiness, that of washing the blood from his hands for ever and being reunited with Siannah. The temple he had been ordered to build is complete, the mysterious pilgrim who is to carve Vishnu's image is at work. Yet once more, Pulo steps outside the realms of the possible by disobeying Vishnu's most stringent condition:

...cuida de no espiar sus operaciones durante la callada noche con una sola o indiscreta mirada; ésta bastaría para que el extranjero desapareciese de tu vista y fueran inútiles cuantos esfuerzos has hecho para dormir tu conciencia y lavar la mancha de sangre de tus manos. (pp. 98-99)

Again, it is not Fate that made him leave his bed and check that the pilgrim is still working, it is the result of a conscious mental act on his part:

Entonces se traba en el alma de Pulo una lucha entre la curiosidad y el temor, lucha que concluye con el triunfo de aquella. (p. 104)

Once he has made that decision, he is again outside Vishnu's protection and Bécquer can write that "un genio del mal guía sus pasos a través de la noche, y estos se dirigen, impulsados por una fuerza incontrastable, hacia el lugar en que se encuentra el peregrino " (p. 104).

With the triumph of Siva thus assured, the ending of the story is in one sense tragic. Pulo's last wish is to see Siannah before he dies. She appears in the temple, but again is unattainable for him, as he has stabbed himself and lies dying at the foot of the blood-spattered image of Siva. Here Professor Woolsey would no doubt point to a tragic irony, with the object of Pulo's love being snatched from him by the decree of the gods. But as has been seen, Pulo knows perfectly well that he could not count on Vishnu's protection if he did not obey his instructions. He chose not to do so, with the result that it was his own weakness, rather than the will of the gods which brought him to that final decision:

La impaciencia ha perdido para siempre al
desgraciado caudillo (p. 105)

When all the Leyendas are considered in this way, it can be seen that in each story where the unattainable is not accepted as such, this non-acceptance is nowhere the result of any other factor than a conscious decision on the part of the main character. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that Fate does not play the important role which has been attributed to it. Supernatural forces may exist throughout each story, but they only act on the characters after those characters have taken one decisive step. This is presented either as an attempt to exceed the realm of what is possible or permitted, as defined by the action of each story; or, on the other hand, as the recognition and acceptance of certain limitations. In the event of the former, the characters are punished, whereas in the latter case they are not. The tragic flaw in Bécquer's heroes is that more often than not, they are attracted to exceed and are consequently led on a disastrous pursuit of what is elusive or

downright impossible. It is surprising that as much was not recognized among critics till as recently as 1966, when A. D. Inglis, in an article occasioned by Professor Woolsey's, wrote:

The elusive, then, attracts because of its elusiveness, and this can give meaning to life rather than bring frustration. But if one is to live with the elusive and the ineffable, one has to accept and savour them as such. Their value must be clearly recognized and turned to account.⁶

El caudillo de las manos rojas does not end with Pulo's death, however, and another aspect of the story illustrates the point Dr. Inglis makes above. In the final section, Siannah throws herself onto her husband's funeral pyre. An ending typical of a Romantic tragedy perhaps, but Dr. Inglis sees it in a different light.

Even El caudillo de las manos rojas viewed on the simplest level of narrative content, is not tragic in its outcome. "Siannah fue la primera viuda indiana que se arrojó al fuego con el cadáver de su esposo" (p. 108). She has accepted the implications of the elusive and unknown, and follows Pulo in pilgrimage "en esas regiones desconocidas, de las que ningun viajero vuelve" (p. 108). These, coming from Bécquer, are not words of doom, but carry the promise of continuing experience, enriched by the very fact that it is unknown and of uncertain outcome.⁷

One might quote as a parallel the ending of La cueva de la mora. Wounded and dying in the cave, the Christian prince and the Moorish princess overcome the barriers that made their love impossible:

"¿Quieres ser cristiana? ¿Quieres morir en mi religión y, si me salvo, salvarte conmigo? "

La mora ... hizo un movimiento imperceptible con la cabeza sobre la cual derramó el caballero el agua bautismal invocando el nombre del Todopoderoso. (p. 264)

In these two endings, Bécquer is not justifying the actions of Pulo or the prince, who both go beyond the limits of the possible in their own story. After all, it is only because of the prince's foolishness in paying too much attention to his princess and not enough to military good sense that the tragic situation arises.

A similar structure can be seen in La promesa and La rosa de pasión. These stories are possibly tragic only in the sense that the heroines of both die, Margarita in the first of love for Pedro, and the Jewess Sara in the second, a victim of her father's rage when he finds that she has renounced her faith for a Christian lover. Yet both may be said to have come to terms with the unattainable. Margarita realizes that her love for Pedro is impossible when she discovers that he is not a simple squire, but a powerful Castilian noble. However, her love continues, symbolized by the protection in battle Pedro receives from the mysterious hand. Sara's love for the Christian impells her to sacrifice her own life so that he may escape her father's revenge. Neither woman attains her love, as both die. But faced with a potentially tragic situation, these two, together with Siannah and the Moorish princess, avoid tragedy in Bécquer's eyes. The scene of conventional tragedy is not the final one. The love of the woman involved adds another dimension. The "promise of continuing experience implicit" in the princess's conversion, or in

Siannah's throwing herself on the pyre with her husband, and the eternal tokens of love which bring La promesa and La rosa de pasión to a close, provide a contrast to the men in each story who choose to ignore the fact that the unattainable is precisely that. Expressed in the terms of our findings in Chapter One, the endings of the stories are model examples of "poesía". The actions of the women stimulate the reader's imagination.. There is no way of knowing how the characters fare after the end of each story, but it is Bécquer's optimistic view that, because we do not know, it is not worth while to suppose anything but the best.

In Gilbert and Sullivan's Patience, Reginald Bunthorne is a caricature of precisely the kind of ethereal poet as described by Mrs. Brown in "The Bécquer Legend". Bunthorne's recipe for success as a poet of this sort, is that one should "get up all the germs of the transcendental terms and plant them everywhere" and that "the meaning doesn't matter if it only idle chatter of a transcendental kind".⁸ In an unguarded moment, however, he confesses to Patience that he is not the mystic he appears, saying: "What's the use of yearning for Elysian fields if you know you can't get 'em and would only let 'em out on building leases if you had 'em?"⁹ Bécquer should be considered to occupy a position midway between these two extremes. To infer from the findings set out above that he is impervious to the attractions of the unattainable, and would much rather go about his business of editing a newspaper is, of course, completely false and would contradict the whole spirit of his work. It is perfectly clear from Chapter One how important the concept of the unattainable is for him. He is fascinated by his lack

of knowledge, whether about objects (the moon in A la claridad de la luna), persons (the woman in Tres fechas and the Ideal Woman in general) or feelings (love, in the Cartas literarias). This fascination is valuable in that it sets his imagination working, giving an added dimension to his experience. In El gnomo, for example, it is evident that he expects the sympathies of his readers to be directed towards Magdalena, to whom the voice of the wind murmurs

Sigue los movimientos de tu corazón, deja que tu alma suba como la llama y las azules espirales del humo. ¡Desdichado el que, teniendo alas, desciende a las profundidades para buscar el oro, pudiendo remontarse a la altura para encontrar amor y sentimiento! (p. 255)

To exclude "poesía" from one's life makes no sense for him. In A la claridad de la luna, it is given equal value as "ciencia". Marta, in El gnomo is led to her destruction by the attraction of what she believes to be material wealth. The irony of La corza blanca lies in the fact that Garcés would not have fired his crossbow at his beloved had he been endowed with a little more imagination:

"¡Oh! Bien dije yo que todas estas cosas no eran más que fantasmagorías del diablo," exclamó entonces el montero;...(p. 299)

Yet imagination or fantasy to the exclusion of everything else is equally as senseless. One may pursue the Ideal, but one should always remember that the Ideal is never going to be attained. Again, this is clear from our first Chapter. The past evokes "poesía" "sólo por no existir ya". The cool weather in Madrid leaves on his arrival. The Leyendas, too, illustrate the unattainability of the Ideal, but add one

important point: Bécquer's view that this is a positive value, carrying with it, in Dr. Inglis's words "the promise of continuing experience".

In the section of the Historia de los templos de España dealing with the basilica of Santa Leocadia, he expresses this idea perfectly:

Inútil fuera el querer hoy dar formas a los mil y mil pensamientos que asaltaron nuestra mente...como esos fantasmas ligerísimos, fenomenos inexplicables de la inspiración que al querer materializarlos pierden su hermosura...; (p. 886)

and the same sentiment is found in Rima I:

Dimos formas reales a un fantasma,
de la mente ridícula invención,
y hecho el ídolo ya, sacrificamos
en su altar nuestro amor. (p. 468)

The ideal solution, then, is to come to terms with the unknown, to accept and savour it as such. In this way, one never reaches the perfect happiness which it appears to have in store, it is true, but then, one never reaches the utter unhappiness which may be there either. Manrique discovers that "el amor es un rayo de luna" (p. 193), but as Bécquer said in the introduction to the story, this is the truth which he will probably be one of the last to realize "dadas mis condiciones de imaginación". Given that it is a "verdad muy triste" (p. 180), Bécquer is not to be pitied because he does not grasp it. Manrique may know that love is a moonbeam; Bécquer is able to imagine that it is not. To use the beautiful image which he uses three times in his work,¹⁰ he still has on his fingers the golden dust from the wings of the butterfly he did not quite catch. This, to debase the image, is much better than the prospect of a squashed butterfly. As Rima III says, though in a different context,

"inspiración" and "razón" are both equally as important.

Quoting Dr. Inglis, it was said earlier that El caudillo de las manos rojas is not tragic in its outcome. Tragedy exists, of course, but it is tragedy of a different kind, the tragedy of the butterfly being squashed unnecessarily. Jean Anouilh's famous definition of tragedy in Antigone places great emphasis on a certain inevitability in the outcome of the situation:

Et voilà. Maintenant le ressort est bandé. Cela n'a plus qu'à se dérouler tout seul...On donne le petit coup de pouce pour que cela démarre...Après, on n'a qu'à laisser faire...Et puis, c'est reposant la tragédie, parce qu'on sait qu'il n'y a plus d'espoir, le sale espoir, qu'on est pris, qu'on est enfin pris comme un rat, avec tout le ciel sur son dos, et qu'on n'a plus qu'à crier.¹¹

In this conception of tragedy, the fact that there is absolutely nothing that the characters can do to avoid the final outcome, is every bit as tragic as the sight of the stage littered with corpses as the final curtain falls. This is where Fate plays an important role; one has "tout le ciel sur son dos". With Bécquer, almost the opposite is true: the tragedy is in the realization that the characters can avoid the final outcome. (If one reads several Leyendas together, it becomes obvious that the same ideas inspire each one. The reading of isolated stories would not have this result and the dénouement would be wholly unexpected. In this fact lies their obvious value as stories for a newspaper.) One of the most poignant moments of El caudillo de las manos rojas is when Pulo leaves his bed and goes, against Vishnu's wishes, to check on the pilgrim's work. The tension in El Cristo de la Calavera reaches such proportions that the feeling of relief is total when Lope throws himself

into his friend's arms. One could pick out incidents from each of the stories where the drama is concentrated solely on the characters themselves and their actions. It is therefore surprising to find such critical judgements as the following:

En el estudio de los personajes ahonda poco, de tal modo que en sus leyendas hay más belleza descriptiva que interés de pasión o de sentimiento,¹²

or:

Bécquer seems to turn his back on reality, on a story [El caudillo de las manos rojas] that involves jealousy, fratricide, passionate love and a life of atonement, in order to paint verbal landscapes and try his poet's hand at a few striking images.¹³

Both of these statements miss the point. The first seeks to make Bécquer a Proust or a Jane Austen, the second a full-blooded romantic or a second-rate writer of ghost stories, as no doubt many of his colleagues were. And, perhaps more serious, both statements fail to see the wood of Bécquer's work as a whole for their own particular trees. Professor King writes:

He does not, as I have pointed out, deal with human behaviour that might lead to supernatural consequences; he deals rather with the consequences themselves.¹⁴

It is to be hoped that this Chapter and the preceding one have shown that nothing could be further from the truth. Bécquer is dealing precisely with human behaviour that leads to supernatural consequences, and also with that behaviour which does not lead to them. In this way,

he seeks to establish a balance in which one can at the same time savour the attractiveness of the unattainable and squarely face reality.

Even the vehicle Bécquer chose for this purpose has not escaped the "Bécquer legend":

Such supernatural themes are a natural choice for a writer whose mind was filled with "unreal" fantasies.¹⁵

Kann man erstaunt sein, wenn die Feder eines Träumers Legenden auf das Papier zaubert?¹⁶

One may accept that Bécquer's mind was so filled, although perhaps some other phrase should be chosen to avoid the impression that he was somewhat demented. However, a statement such as the above comes dangerously close to saying that a writer with great imaginative powers is going to choose supernatural themes to write on as a matter of course. Whereas to attribute the origins of these imaginative powers to the times in which he lived would be unjustifiably deterministic, the way in which they are manifested must, in some degree, be due to the literary fashions of the times--and these were the times of Hoffman and Poe. The study of literary influences for their own sake is often a most pointless one. However, when there are to be found such comments as "...de esta, en fin, incesante y viva gestación del cerebro, nacen sus poéticas Leyendas, tan ricas y jugosas de estilo como originales de invención, modelos de un género literario apenas cultivado en España",¹⁷ studies of the kind of Dr. Gallaher's¹⁸ are vital, and the numerous minor articles on the influences in Bécquer's work may have their uses.¹⁹

Indeed, some of the examples Dr. Gallaher gives of stories written in the years preceding Bécquer's literary production, show that the latter was remarkably restrained in his writing. Critics have not wholly passed

this by, however, and have remarked on the "controlled" Romanticism to be found in his work. As an introduction to his section on Bécquer, J. R. Stamm writes:

As the currents of Romanticism paled somewhat toward the middle of the nineteenth century, a new generation brought a spirit of controlled literary craftsmanship to Spanish letters--a "second Romanticism" quite distinct from the revolutionary beginnings of the movement in choice of theme or language...these writers retained the sensitivity and directness of Romanticism without its excesses.²⁰

Dr. Hämel attributes the greatness of Bécquer's work to the balance he has been able to achieve between on the one hand the flights of imagination and fantasy which, she says, characterize the real Bécquer, and on the other, the control of these imposed by his careful craftsmanship:

Wenn sich die Legenden ihrer gedanklichen Seite nach also Schöpfungen einer träumerisch und phantastisch veranlagten und pessimistisch gestimmten Persönlichkeit enthüllen, so zeigen sie sich, vom ästhetischen Standpunkt gewertet, als Erzeugnisse einer klar überlegenden, zielbewusst arbeitenden, für malerische Reize aufs feinste gestimmten Schöpferkraft. Der Träumer ist also doch nicht so bandelos um nicht die Fesseln des Kunstlers zu ertragen.²¹

The notion of controlled Romanticism is an apt one, and there is no reason why it cannot be applied to the content of the Leyendas as well as to the form. Certainly, Bécquer's craftsmanship is excellent, but a more important manifestation of this "control" is to be found in the fact that although his imagination is a very real force, he never allows himself to be carried away by it. In the Leyendas he repeatedly points out the dangers attached, either explicitly, or implicitly through contrast,

when he demonstrates the subsequent happiness of those of his characters who manage to strike a balance between too much imagination and not enough.

NOTES

- ¹ Art. cit., p. 277.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid., p. 280.
- ⁴ Art. cit., p. 352. See above, Introduction, note 5.
- ⁵ King, p. 69.
- ⁶ "The real and the imagined in Bécquer's Leyendas", BHS, XLIII (1966), 25-31. See p. 26.
- ⁷ Art. cit., pp. 25-26.
- ⁸ W. S. Gilbert, The Savoy Operas (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), I, 189.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 191.
- ¹⁰ Tres fechas (p. 380);
Historia de los templos de España (p. 886);
Crítica literaria (p. 1272).
- ¹¹ Antigone (Paris: La table ronde, 1946), pp. 54-56.
- ¹² Quoted in M. Baquero Goyanés, El cuento español en el siglo XIX (Madrid, 1949), p. 223. footnote.
- ¹³ King, p. 67.
- ¹⁴ King, p. 64.
- ¹⁵ King, p. 69.
- ¹⁶ Hämel, art. cit., p. 349.
- ¹⁷ "Semblanza de Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer", Joaquín y Serafín Alvarez Quintero, (p. 38).

¹⁸"The predecessors of Bécquer in the fantastic tale", Southeastern Louisiana College Bulletin, VI (1949). This article also quotes the Quintero brothers.

¹⁹Items 92-126 in Professor Benítez's bibliography list articles on influences in Bécquer's poetry. It can be seen that they are amazing in their variety. The articles on influences in his prose are less numerous, being listed in items 212-219. One might also mention J. Gulsoy's article "La fuente común de Los ojos verdes y El rayo de luna de G. A. Bécquer", BHS, XLIV (1967), 96-106. It should be realized that studies like Dr. Gallaher's and Sr. Díaz's book Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, vida y poesía, (See p. 123 ff.), do not intend to belittle Bécquer's talent by setting him in his literary environment. Both scholars in fact show how, in Bécquer, this tradition reaches its highest level of achievement.

We also believe that it would be possible to study other literatures of the time with a view to relating Bécquer to prevailing currents elsewhere. For the vexed question of German influences, for example, see the article by Graham Orton (listed incorrectly in Sr. Benítez's bibliography under Artur Graham): "The German elements in Bécquer's Rimas", PMLA, LXXII (1957), 194-224, and Henry Charles Turk, German Romanticism in Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's short stories (Lawrence, Kansas: Allen Press 1959).

²⁰A short history of Spanish literature (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), pp. 143-144.

²¹Art. cit., p. 356.

CHAPTER FOUR

It will have been noticed that the actual structure of the stories, as we have examined them in Chapters Two and Three, leaves the question of the nature of the unattainable aside, and rather deals with the merits of a balanced approach to the whole concept. It would therefore be wrong to undertake a discussion of that concept in the leyendas without some examination of Bécquer's way of communicating his feelings about its nature to his readers. This too is the result of the ideas produced by his imagination, and therefore consistent with our findings in Chapter One where it was seen how his imagination, more than any intellectual facilities gives rise to his whole system of thought.

It may be termed the unattainability of adequate expression, for one of the most frequently repeated aspects of Bécquer's literary ideas is his inability to express what he would like to express in the way he would like to express it.

Let it not be supposed that this failure is a mark of detachment from reality, however. If such were the case, few would be left to make up that reality. In everyday English, for example, expressions like "there are no words to describe ...", or "I cannot begin to say ...", are used so often that they become clichés. But when Bécquer uses phrases such as "es imposible de describir ...", he is not being banal, but rather describing the common human experience which gave rise to the cliché originally:

¿Cómo la palabra, cómo un idioma grosero y mezquino, insuficiente a veces para expresar las necesidades de la materia, podrá servir de digno intérprete entre dos almas? (p. 661)

The same idea is found in Rima I

Yo quisiera escribirlo, del hombre
domando el rebelde, mezquino idioma,
con palabras que fuesen a un tiempo
suspiros y risas, colores y notas.

Pero en vano es luchar; que no hay cifra
capaz de encerrarlo..., (p. 435)

and also in the Introducción sinfónica:

Yo quisiera poder cincelar la forma que ha de conteneros,
como se cincela el vaso de oro que ha de guardar un preciado
perfume. Mas es imposible. (p. 50)

What happens when he tries to express himself is that the resources
at his disposal are inadequate:

Si tú supieras cómo las ideas más grandes se empequeñecen
al encerrarse en el círculo de hierro de la palabra; (p. 660)

Inútil fuera el querer hoy dar formas a los mil y mil
pensamientos que asaltaron nuestra mente...que al querer
materializarlos pierden su hermosura,... (p. 886)

At first sight, there appears to be a contradiction between
Bécquer confessing failure here, and the Bécquer who is more than capable
of careful, accurate descriptions. His account of San Juan de los Reyes
in the Historia de los templos de España (p. 844-874) shows a scientific
approach that would not be out of place in an architectural treatise,
which in certain respects the work was intended to be. One does not have
to look far in the Leyendas for detailed descriptions. Such passages are

in El Cristo de la Calavera (pp. 223-224), La promesa (pp. 272-275), La venta de los gatos (a narración) (pp. 344-346), Tres fechas (pp. 389-391). It is interesting to note, however, that he should often refer to the impossibility of the task of composing such descriptions. It is equally interesting to realize that this confession of failure comes at or near the end of an eminently successful description ranging from two-thirds of a page to four pages long. Yet, it is important to see that it is never any tangible object that defeats his powers, but the impression produced by the scene, often on senses other than the sight:

...formaban un infernal y atronador conjunto, imposible de pintar con palabras. (p. 224)

...una vida y una animación imposible de pintar con palabras. (p. 274)

...una alegre algarabía imposible de describir. (p. 345)

...un edificio tan original, tan lleno de contraste, de poesía y de recuerdos como el que aquella tarde se ofreció a mi vista y hoy he ensayado, aunque en vano, describir con palabras. (p. 391)

When one begins to deal with impressions produced by "objects", one is coming close to the definition proposed in the first Chapter for "poesía". This is where the contradiction mentioned above is resolved. Indeed, one can often find descriptions of scenes or landscapes which produce an impression on Bécquer, who then passes to a description of the impression, and it is the impression which is difficult to describe. An example of this can be found in the paragraph immediately following the passage from Tres fechas (p. 391) just quoted:

Ya lo había trazado en parte en una de las hojas de mi cartera ... [pero] ... dejé caer de mis manos el lápiz y abandoné el dibujo, recostándome en la pared que tenía a mis espaldas y entregándome por completo a los sueños de la imaginación.

This leads the reader into another typically Becquerian description of those "sueños". The same structure is found in the Cartas desde mi celda, where, after a long description of the Aragonese countryside, Bécquer describes himself as "lleno de esa emoción sin ideas que experimentamos siempre que una cosa cualquiera nos impresiona profundamente y parece que nos sobrecoge por su novedad o su hermosura " (p. 562). Likewise the scene from La cruz del diablo which has already been mentioned, where his mind is assaulted by ideas provoked by a combination of the solitude, the silence and his vague melancholy.¹

Thus, when it is realized just what he is trying to express, his difficulty is understandable:

Por los tenebrosos rincones de mi cerebro, acurrucados y desnudos, duermen los extravagantes hijos de mi fantasía ... Y aquí dentro, desnudos y deformes, revueltos y barajados en indescriptible confusión, los siento a veces agitarse y vivir con una vida oscura y extraña ... (p. 49)

Las ideas vagan confusas, como esas concepciones sin formas ni color que se ciernen en el cerebro del poeta, como esas sombras, hijas del delirio, que nos llaman al pasar y huyen, nos brindan amor y se desvanecen entre nuestros brazos. (pp. 71-72)

Ideas ligerísimas sin forma determinada que unían entre sí como un invisible hilo de luz, la profunda soledad de aquellos lugares, el alto silencio de la naciente noche y la vaga melancolía de mi espíritu. (p. 110)

These are what Professor King calls "wordless fantasies". But they are no more fantastic than Coleridge's jottings in his note

book - the Gutch memorandum book - described by J. L. Lowes as follows:

Nightingales, and snake-birds, and footless birds of Paradise; the fauna of polar and of tropic seas, and of strange inland pools and subterranean streams; the daemons of the elements, stars and their angel guardians; maniacs and murderers and mutineers; shipwrecks and gibbets; dewdrops and dung-hills and diamonds and lichen stones; haloes over frosty meadows, and rainbows in the spray, and the ice-blink and the luminous wake of ships; Jonah, and Tobit, and Nimrod, and Ham, and the uncanny legends of the antediluvian world ...²

Professor Lowes is at pains to point out, however, that this jumble is the very essence of the creative process:

For the more multifarious, even the more incongruous and chaotic the welter, the freer play it offers to those darting and prehensile filaments of association which reach out in all directions through the mass.³

The "filaments of association" exist in Bécquer too, in the form of the "hilo de luz" already cited from his work (p. 110) and found in several other places also:

Hilo de luz que en haces/los pensamientos ata; ...
(p. 438)

...si tu supieras cuán imperceptible es el
hilo de luz que ata entre sí los pensamientos más absurdos que nadan en su caos:... (p. 660)

One could also mention Tres fechas in which he twice refers to the same thread of light which binds together the three isolated incidents which make up the story (pp. 381, 401). Moreover, Professor Lowes goes to some lengths to show that the confused mass of ideas is not peculiar

to Coleridge, or indeed to those with Coleridge's imaginative power.

His findings can equally well be applied to Bécquer:

If all that should wear, as it may, the aspect of a fabric woven of cobwebs from a Romantic poet's brain, let me summon two witnesses whose intellectual stability and poise admits (sic) no such impeachment.⁴

The first example is that of the distinguished mathematician Henri Poincaré, who, in his book Science et Méthode, writes:

They [the isolated elements which go to make up a future discovery] plough through space in all directions, like a swarm of gnats, for instance, or, if we prefer a more learned comparison, like the gaseous molecules in the kinetic theory of gases.⁵

The second is the playwright Dryden, who, writing about his work The Rival Ladies describes its first stages as a "confus'd Mass of Thoughts tumbling over one another in the Dark:..."⁶ Professor Lowes confesses that he is not a trained psychologist, but even so, says that he cannot ignore the testimonies of these persons "all practiced and acute observers of their mental processes".⁷ It is in fact difficult to see what even a trained psychologist can do except analyze the statements of creative artists. Thus Brewster Ghiselin quotes Paul Valéry as saying:

For the fact is that disorder is the condition of the mind's fertility: it contains the mind's promise, since its fertility depends on the unexpected rather than the expected, depends on what we do not know, and because we do not know it, than what we do know.⁸

Likewise, Ernst Kris reports A. E. Houseman's description of the beginning of a poem, a description which, apart from the undercurrents of humour, bears a marked resemblance to Bécquer's in the third of the Cartas desde mi celda:

Having drunk a pint of beer at lunchtime ...
I would go out for a walk. As I went along,
thinking of nothing in particular, there
would flow into my mind with sudden and
unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line
or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza
at once, accompanied, not preceded, by a
vague notion of the poem as a whole.⁹

Bécquer's description runs:

En esos instantes rapidísimos en que la
sensación fecunda a la inteligencia y
allá en el fondo del cerebro tiene lugar
la misteriosa concepción de los pensamientos
que han de surgir algún día evocados por
la memoria, nada se piensa, nada se razona,
los sentidos todos parecen ocupados en
recibir y guardar la impresión que ana-
lizarán más tarde...Estas ideas que ya han
cruzado otras veces por la imaginación
y duermen olvidadas en alguno de sus
rincones son siempre las primeras en acu-
dir cuando se toca su resorte misterioso.
(p. 562)

As J. Hartsook says, then:

Bécquer's accounts of the workings of the sub-
conscious in the process of creation are
remarkably faithful to the findings of modern
psychologists. Living in an age when Freud
and psychoanalysis were entirely unknown,
his descriptions of his own mental activity
are all the more amazing.¹⁰

This is certainly true. If the creative processes which Bécquer describes
are common not only to Romantic poets, but also to artists of many

different dispositions, he can only be referred to as "ethereal" if to be ethereal means to be interested in the workings of his own mind:

Indeed, if we choose to consider these revelations as substantially truthful...they appear more in the light of clinical observations than as the bemused and fanciful inventions of a dreamy and Romantic poet as they must have seemed to his contemporaries.¹¹

And not only to his contemporaries. Professor King writes:

The whole of Bécquer's poetics may be condensed into some such statement as this: I turn my back on mundane realities: I long to embrace the insubstantial reality of pure beauty which I cannot reach.¹²

Surely it would be better to say that the reality which Bécquer is striving to express is that of the workings of his own mind, which in turn must present problems of expression.

But as Mallarmé wrote, "It is not with ideas...that poetry is made. It is with words". Professor King aptly entitles one of his chapters "The Determination to Write". Writing was Bécquer's chosen profession. He had considerable observational skill and the talent to be able to express external reality, which often had the effect of stimulating his imagination. The result of the observation, however, was his ability to record the workings of that imagination. There remain to be discussed the techniques he uses to do this.

The line, "The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed on a stormy sea", from Alfred Noyes' poem The Highwayman,¹³ can be used to illustrate Bécquer's procedures. Noyes wants his readers to visualize the moon on a stormy night, and does so by relating it to a galleon. The reader,

acquainted with both the moon and a galleon, pays no attention, from the point of view of comprehension, to the equation "moon = galleon", but expands the line thus: the impression of the moon on that particular night is reminiscent of certain aspects of the impression caused by the sight of a galleon on a stormy sea, in that the effect of the clouds scudding past, sometimes hiding from view, is like that of waves which would often conceal the ship wholly or partly from an observer on the shore. Noyes is in fact asking the reader to visualize a galleon and apply what he sees to the moon on that night, thereby assuming that the two situations have some aspects in common. To a reader who had no idea what a galleon was, or could not for some reason visualize a stormy sea, the metaphor would have no meaning. The fact is that there are relatively few people in that situation and so the image is accepted.

Bécquer is dealing in concepts must less concrete than the image described above. But the same reasoning applies. If he describes inspiration as "deformes silüetas/ de seres imposibles" (p. 437), or two lovers as "dos jirones de vapor" (p. 453) and the reader is able to appreciate the similarity between the two notions, Bécquer has succeeded. For he is dealing with emotions and feelings, and as T. S. Eliot puts it:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "object correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given the emotion is immediately evoked.¹⁴

Dr. Aguirre quotes Eliot in his article and then goes on to show that

Bécquer's images must be vague if they are to be successful:

La anterior relación acumulativa de los "objetos" empleados por Bécquer evidencia el gusto y la preferencia del poeta por lo impreciso. Para Bécquer, el sentimiento - la poesía - es "indefinible esencia" (Rima V) ... la manera de evocarlo es utilizar cosas que se presentan como indefinibles a nuestros sentidos.¹⁵

Hence it is clear that, more so than in the case of concrete images, the success or failure of Bécquer's abstract ones depends not so much on the intellectual capabilities of the reader but on his emotional receptiveness. The small number of readers of The Highwayman who could not visualize a galleon in a storm could resolve the matter by looking at a picture of one; a second reading would then reveal the force of the image. But a reader whose imagination is awakened by an image of Bécquer's has no way of explaining how this was done to a reader who remains unmoved.¹⁶ It is to Bécquer's credit that he does not forget those in his audience in the second category. This he does by accepting that "poesía" might not be universally felt:

A las doce de la mañana, después de almorzar bien, y con un cigarro en la boca, no le (sic) hará mucho efecto a los lectores de El contemporáneo (p. 140)

or by expressing the hope that those who did not understand his descriptions may at least find them interesting:

Que lo creas o no, me importa bien poco.
Mi abuelo se lo narró a mi padre, mi
padre me lo ha referido a mí, y yo te
lo cuento ahora, siquiera no sea más
que por pasar el rato. (p. 109)

Otro, con esta idea, tal vez, hubiera
hecho un tomo de filosofía lacrimosa;
yo he escrito esta leyenda, que, a los
que nada vean en su fondo, al menos
podrá entretenerlos un rato. (p. 180)

However, the vital weapon in Bécquer's armoury is that "todo el mundo siente" (p. 659). He did not believe that imagination was peculiar to him. In the Cartas literarias, for example, he states that his views on woman and poetry are shared by everyone:

...yo creo, y conmigo lo creen todos, que las
mujeres son la poesía del mundo. (p. 666)

It was seen in Chapter One how his only way of describing love was to tell his questioner: "Recógete dentro de ti misma...y lo comprenderás, pero no me lo preguntes" (p. 665). His view of the poet is not the same as Baudelaire's in L'Albatros or Vigny's in Moïse. The only difference between the ordinary man and the poet is the latter's ability to retain the impression of what he feels:

Sólo a algunos seres les es dado el guardar
como un tesoro la memoria viva de lo que han
sentido. Yo creo que estos son los poetas.
Es más: creo que únicamente por esto lo son.
(p. 659)

Since, then, everyone is susceptible to the same sort of emotion as he is, an easy way for him to express his own feelings is not to describe them explicitly - which is impossible anyway - but to suggest those feelings in others. Hence the use of "object correlatives". The evocation of ideas, it will be remembered, was a characteristic of one type of poetry which Bécquer described in his review of Augusto Ferrán's collection of poems, La soledad:

Hay otra [poesía] natural, breve, seca, que brota del alma como una chispa eléctrica, que hiere el sentimiento con una palabra y huye, y desnuda de artificio, desembarazada dentro de una forma libre, despierta, con una que las toca, las mil ideas que duermen en el océano sin fondo de la fantasía. (p. 1247)

On finishing a reading of this kind of poetry, according to Bécquer, "se inclina la frente cargada de pensamientos sin nombre" (p. 1248), and whereas the first, more sonorous poetry is a complete melody, "la segunda es un acorde que se arranca de un arpa y se quedan las cuerdas vibrando con un zumbido armonioso" (p. 1248). It has been seen (Chapter Three, n. 19), that the second kind of poetry was gaining a following in Bécquer's active period, and that it was the kind of poetry he wrote. An appreciation of the same techniques is also found in the prose. In Los ojos verdes, when trying to describe the eyes, he writes:

De seguro, no los podré describir tal cuales ellos eran: luminosos, transparentes como las gotas de la lluvia que se resbalan sobre las hojas de los árboles después de una tempestad de verano. De todos modos, cuento con la imaginación de mis lectores para hacerme comprender ... (p. 151)

About the narración ¡Es raro!, he writes:

No obstante, la referiré en pocas palabras, pues para el que haya de comprenderlo todavía sobrarán algunas. (p. 359)

And in the second letter "desde mi celda":

...si alguno de mis lectores ha sentido otra vez algo de lo que yo siento ahora, mis palabras le llevarán al recuerdo de más tranquillos días ... (p. 557).

Later, in the fifth letter, describing the market place at Tarazona, he writes (again after a two page account of individual details of a scene whose overall effect he confesses his inability to describe):

...si ustedes con su imaginación no hacen en él [el caos] la luz y lo ordenan y colocan a su gusto todas estas cosas que yo arrojo a granel sobre las cuartillas, las figuras de mi cuadro se quedarán sin fondo ... (p. 584).

Bécquer is not alone in this problem. Virginia Burden, in the first chapter of her book, The Process of Intuition writes:

Efforts to describe in words the meaning, nature and function on intuition are doomed to failure simply because intuition must be understood by intuition. The best that any written work on the subject can do is to attempt to put the reader in the way of having an intuitive experience himself, or to arouse in him the memory of such.¹⁷

Where Bécquer would disagree with her views is in her next but one sentence:

We cannot reason about this intuition very much, simply because the intuitive faculty is one which transcends reason and makes it obsolete as the final authority.¹⁸

Bécquer does reason, not about intuition, but about what he calls "inspiración" (p. 436). Reason is vitally important, even though it may seem to get in the way:

¡El orden! ¡Lo detesto, y, sin embargo es tan preciso para todo! ... (p. 661)

The balance in the structure of Rima III would lead one to believe that reason is equally as important as inspiration. He has to reason, because he wants to communicate to his readers those thoughts and impressions which may later form themselves into art. This procedure does not make him "ethereal" or "weltfern", to use Dr. Hämel's apt word. It makes him a reasoned observer of himself, who asks the reader to meet him halfway in order to communicate feelings which can only be transmitted with that cooperation. Seen in this light, the ethereal descriptions in his legends are no longer the "bemused and fanciful inventions of a dreamy and Romantic poet". Maese Pérez's playing, the divine Miserere, the green eyes which enticed Fernando or the experiences of Teobaldo are "object correlatives" of the same kind as Dr. Aguirre found in the Rimas. They are Bécquer's way of communicating, as clearly as he knows how, those feelings whose existence he constantly described and the attitude to which he explained in the structure of the Leyendas. He is never satisfied about the way he does this, he is never convinced that the words he chooses are the right ones to affect his readers in the way he would like. In this respect a definitive victory in what C. Blanco Aguinaga calls "La lucha con la palabra" is as unattainable as Manrique's moonbeam. In fact, it is true that there is no logic by which to determine his success or failure. This will be measured by the receptiveness of the reader. He may go a little far in saying that everyone shares his views on woman and poetry; he is on safer ground when he says that "todo el mundo siente". There is no need to refer to

psychological treatises to support his contention that everyone is endowed with imagination to a greater or lesser degree. Bécquer had it to a high degree, and this is what enabled him to exploit its possibilities more than is normal. It would be unjust were a reader to dismiss him as an ethereal poet the first time he comes across a reference to "ideas sin forma" or "vagos rumores indefinibles".

Everyone has some powers of imagination, and therefore when he describes those powers - albeit in non-scientific terms, because the relevant science did not then exist - there is no reason to consider him as a "self-confessed dreamer of wordless fantasies". Rather what he has to say about imagination should be seen in the context of his ideas as a whole. It will then be clear that he is dealing with emotions and feelings a lot more familiar to his reader than the latter may perhaps think.

NOTES

- ¹ As was shown in Chapter One, Bécquer considered religion to be but a better-known manifestation of the workings of the imagination. Thus, the same structure can be observed in religious passages. In fact, it may be said that if the stimulus, instead of a landscape, for example, is a religious one, the "sueños" are equally imprecise, but of a religious nature. See for example La Cruz del Diablo. Apart from the ideas evoked by the landscape, there are those evoked by the cross: "Impulsado de un pensamiento religioso, espontáneo e indefinible ..." (p. 110), or those evoked by Toledo Cathedral in La ajorca de oro:
En su seno viven el silencio, la majestad, la poesía del misticismo y un santo horror que defiende sus umbrales contra los pensamientos mundanos y las mezquinas pasiones de la tierra. La consunción material se alivia respirando el aire puro de las montañas: el ateísmo debe curarse respirando su atmósfera de fe. (p. 135)
- ² John Livingstone Lowes, The road to Xanadu, (Boston & New York, 1930) p. 60.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Op. cit., p. 61.
- ⁵ Paris, 1908, trans. Francis Maitland, Science and Method (London, no date), quoted by Lowes, p. 62.
- ⁶ Quoted by Lowes, p. 63.
- ⁷ Lowes, p. 55.
- ⁸ The Creative Process (New York, 1955), p. 105, quoted by Hartsook (see our Introduction, note 10), p. 259.
- ⁹ Quoted by Ernst Kris, "On inspiration: preliminary notes on emotional conditions in creative states", in The Creative Imagination: psycho-analysis and the genius of Inspiration, ed. Hendrik Ruitenbeck (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), p. 150.
- ¹⁰ Loc. cit., p. 253.
- ¹¹ Hartsook, p. 254.

¹²King, p. 124.

¹³Twentieth century verse (Toronto: Clark, Irwin & Co., 1945), p. 322.

¹⁴"Hamlet", Selected Essays (London, 1953), p. 145.

¹⁵Aguirre, art. cit., p. 34.

¹⁶The situation would be almost analogous to reading Eliot's The Waste Land without the explanatory notes provided by the poet. In Bécquer, the explanatory notes are in the form of emotional or imaginative responses provided by the reader at the writer's provocation.

¹⁷New York, 1957, p. 13.

¹⁸Ibid.

CONCLUSION

It is evident, then, from the discussion presented in the previous chapters, that Bécquer was the first to realize that his powers of imagination were more highly developed than those of the vast majority of others. Moreover, as a journalist, he was well able to reveal to his contemporaries vast horizons which they could not, or would not, see because of what Rica Brown calls "the shoddy materialism of that post-Romantic epoch".¹

His love of the country, for example, by no means meant that he was a recluse. Like Fray Luis de León, he would gladly leave the bustle of the city to seek peace in the country. Unlike Fray Luis, he went there also to find Spain, a different one, it is true, from that of Madrid, but equally as real. This is the Spain of the Cartas desde mi celda, the setting of some of the Leyendas, and the Spain he and his brother set out to capture for the readers of their newspaper. These travels with Valeriano, who had received a grant from the government for the purpose, must have seemed to him like the answer to his plea in the fourth Carta desde mi celda that "el Gobierno debía fomentar la organización periódica de algunas expediciones artísticas a nuestras provincias. Estas expediciones, compuestas de grupos de un pintor, un arquitecto y un literato, seguramente recogerían preciosos materiales para obras de gran entidad" (p. 580). This attitude did not mean that Bécquer was turning his back on reality. It is merely his way of emphasizing that life in Madrid in the 1860's was not the only necessary ingredient of a meaningful existence.

It was for a similar purpose that he stressed the importance of the imagination. This essay has not been an attempt to rationalize Bécquer completely. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with either of the elements in Rodríguez Correa's oft-quoted description of Bécquer as a "soñador enfermizo". Sickly he certainly was at times, a fact which any biography will confirm. He was a dreamer too: one cannot read more than a few pages of his work without coming across some product of his dreams. He was only too glad at times to take Bunthorne's advice to Patience and "lie among the daisies and discourse in novel phrases of your complicated state of mind".² The two elements together, however, have misleading connotations and it is these which have been questioned. For his dreaming was not sickly. His imagination opened up new vistas for him, which he considered to be vital forces in his life, worthy of being passed on to others, rather than being isolated and hidden like a disease.

This is not to say that Bécquer dreamed what no-one else could have dreamed before. The stimuli for his imagination were by no means in the nature of private revelations: they were available to anyone disposed to take advantage of them. His love of solitude provides an example. It will be remembered how he says of Manrique that

En cualquiera parte estará menos en donde esté
todo el mundo.

En efecto, Manrique amaba la soledad, y la
amaba de tal modo que algunas veces hubiera
deseado no tener sombra, porque su sombra no lo
siguiese a todas partes. (p. 181)

Bécquer loved solitude too, of course, but not to the extent of cutting off complete contact with the world. In La mujer de piedra, he explains why he likes to be alone, but ends with the caution, "Esta pronunciada afición degenera a veces en extravagancia, ..." (p. 794). We can contrast Bécquer's own behaviour and Manrique's in this respect. The former spends his time thus:

...acaso estará en el claustro del monasterio de la Peña, sentado al borde de una tumba, prestando oído a ver si sorprende alguna palabra de la conversación de los muertos; o en el puente, mirando correr una tras otra las olas del río por debajo de sus arcos; o acurrucado en la quiebra de una roca y entretenido en contar las estrellas del cielo, en seguir una nube con la vista o contemplar los fuegos fatuos que cruzan como exhalaciones sobre el haz de las lagunas. (p. 181)

Bécquer, on the other hand, finds himself at the church described in La mujer de piedra for no more ethereal reason than the fact that "a las mañanas se tomaba bien el sol contra la tapia del convento, ya porque al caer la tarde de un día nebuloso y frío se sentía allí menos el embate del aire" (p. 801). Moreover, whereas there is a certain "poesía" to be found in gay market-places for example, the "poesía" of a church is best contemplated in silence. Surely, this is not such an unusual view. Certainly, when he is alone he finds "en todo ello algo de la virginidad de los sentimientos y las cosas " (p. 794). This often has the result that, because of his close examinations and his trained eye, he finds some detail which would probably escape the notice of a less keen observer:

Por el contrario, cuando descubro un detalle o un accidente que creo ha pasado hasta entonces inadvertido, encuentro cierta egoísta voluptuosidad en contemplarlo a solas, en creer que únicamente para mí existe guardado, a fin de que yo lo aspire y goce su delicado perfume de virginidad y misterio. (pp. 796-797)

However, it should be clearly realized that Bécquer is doing nothing more nor less than looking at a church. He does it after his own fashion, of course, but not in any way impossible to others who might profit from their experience without being accused, like Manrique, of madness.

But although there is no way of knowing if Bécquer was the first to feel what he describes, we are on surer ground in asserting that he is the first to describe those feelings, at least in Spanish literature, with any conspicuous success. In his poetry, he was lucky in being able to profit from the existence of a suitable vehicle whose possibilities had not been fully explored - the poetry which is "natural, breve, seca". In his prose, which has been the principal subject for this discussion, he has done so at greater length, but still in the same way, as he is dealing with the same processes of creation. The kind of poetry he prefers "adquiere las proporciones de la imaginación que impresiona" (p. 1248). Likewise, his imaginative prose is constructed so as to communicate his feelings to the reader who, once his imagination is thereby stimulated, may share those feelings and remember others of his own.

But as he says in La mujer de piedra, "Las obras de la imaginación tienen siempre algún punto de contacto con la realidad" (p. 802). A major part of this study dealt with the way in which the Leyendas always contained this definite point of contact, and contrasted the outcome

of the characters who maintained it with that of those who did not. For this is the point which has not been given the prominence it deserves in the criticism of Bécquer's work in the years since his death. Bécquer is "emotional", certainly, in that his whole concept of "poesía" is based on certain emotional responses to poetic stimuli. But his description of these stimuli and the feelings they produce is completely systematic. He may have been attracted by the unattainable, but he knew more about it than his critics have admitted. He knew what it was and where to look for it; he knew the value of it and the dangers associated with it; above all he had the capacity to communicate all this to his reader. It is erroneous to argue that because he deals with the unattainable sources of his own emotions, he must be out of touch with reality, when descriptions, and indeed the very structure of his stories are a continuous rational justification of the themes he deals with. There is surely nothing less esoteric than his assertion that "todo el mundo siente" (p. 659), and his works, although based on the workings of his imagination, are a constant invitation to his readers to share those real experiences with him.

NOTES

¹ See Chapter One above, n. 11.

² Gilbert, *op. cit.*, I 189.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Throughout this list, the names of certain periodicals are abbreviated:

- BHisp - Bulletin Hispanique
- BHS - Bulletin of Hispanic Studies
- BSS - Bulletin of Spanish Studies
- HR - Hispanic Review
- PMLA - Publication of the Modern Language Association
- RFE - Revista de Filología Española

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